FRAGGED KINGDOM 2

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Created by Wade Dyer

Malicious forces gather within and around the Kingdom of Ire as her ageing demigod king nears death; if they are to survive they must break free from their enemies and forge new frontiers. Will you fight for your people's future?

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New and ancient gods stir in the

Wild & Techno-Magical

world of Akharon.

Malicious forces gather within and around the

Kingdom of Ire

as her ageing demigod king nears death.
Will you fight for her future?

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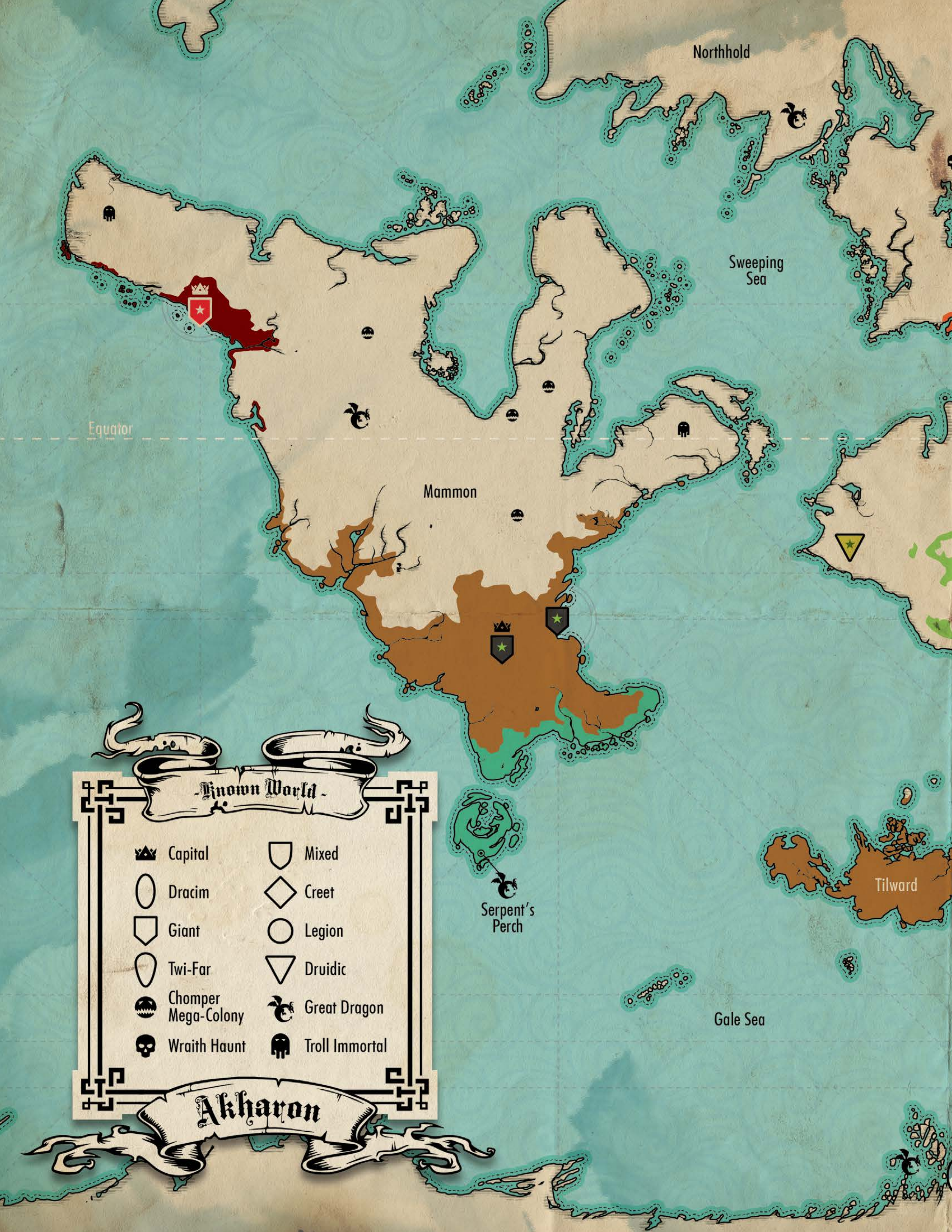
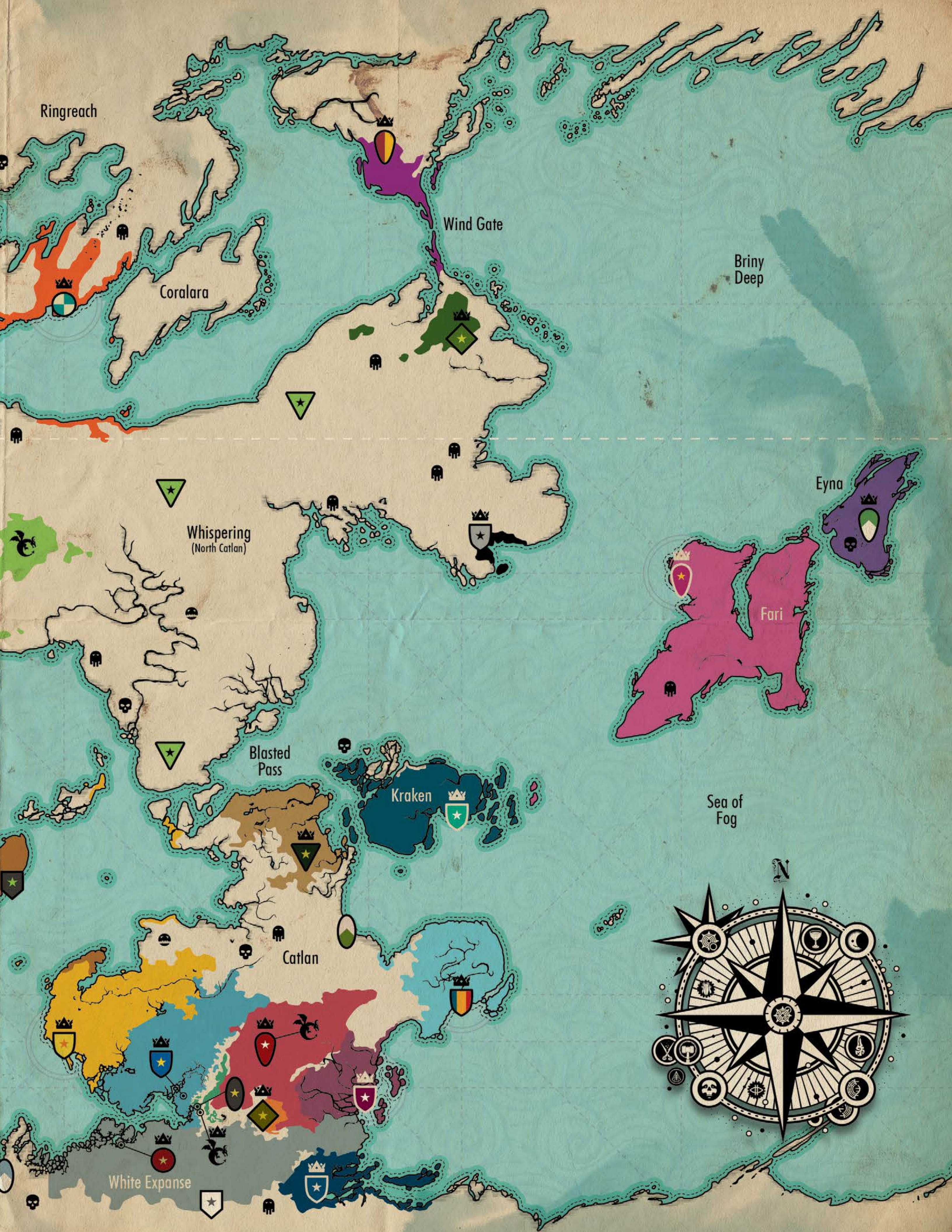

Northhold
Sweeping Sea
Equator
Mammon
Serpent's Perch
Tilward
Gale Sea
Known World
Capital
Mixed
Dracim
Creet
Giant
Legion
Twi-Far
Druidic
Chomper Mega-Colony
Great Dragon
Wraith Haunt
Troll Immortal
Akharon


Ringreach
Wind Gate
Briny Deep
Coralara
Eyna
Whispering (North Catlan)
Fari
Blasted Pass
Kraken
Sea of Fog
N
Catlan
White Expanse

Creet

Created by the evil god Dos, the crystalline Creet have long distrusted all deities and hidden away from their selfish schemes and untrustworthy magic. Primarily in the distant northeast of the Whispering Jungle (Verdant Creet) and the volcanic southern mountains of the Blood Stone Desert (Ashen Creet), the Creet have been so effective at remaining hidden that their presence was not known until they were discovered during the Druidic War just two centuries past. There are undoubtedly more hidden Creet nations to be found.

The Creet were enslaved by the Archdruid to fight in his great war, and by the Twi-Far Drasong Clan for cheap labour and to be sold to the Holy Kingdom of Catla. The majority found their freedom with the civil war that created the Kingdom of Ire. Some have sought to return to their ancestral homes but most have remained to forge themselves into a new people (Unveiled Creet) that are starting to make use of techno-magic and worship gods for the first time.

Creet are famous for their crystalized bones and skin, and are a hardy and good-natured people who love to work with natural wood, stone and crystals. They consider metal a culinary delicacy and love to keep animals as pets.

- Species Stats:
  - +1 Construction and Forestry.
  - Resistance 2 (Stacks).
  - Calm animals do not have run/eat instincts towards you.
  - Your Camp gains +1 Planning.
  - -2 max Intelligence.
  - -1 Metallurgy.

- Common Characteristics:
  - Gruff, hardworking, honourable, jovial, protective, traditional.
  - Often cautious of gods, great spirits, metal and magic.

  - Average Life: 94 years.
  - Long hair and/or beards.
  - Coloured crystal bones and portions of their skin.
  - Light to dark brown skin tones.
  - Diet: Love to eat, and need to eat some crystal and rocks.

- Example First Names:
  - Ari (m), Brynhildur (f), Einar (m), Freyr (m), Freyja (f), Haraldur (m), Hildur (f), Ingibjörg (f), Ingvar (m), Íris (f), Ragnar (m).
- Family Names:
  - Traditional Creet do not have family names, their names are paired with a patronymic name that identifies their father. A matronymic name is used if a father is unknown, banished or if they belong to a small matriarchal sect.
  - Most modern Creet from the Kingdom of Ire have started to use crystal-themed family names.
  - Berylstone, Crystalhart, Garnetpeak, Opalshine, Rubyglade.

- Eternal God Creator: Dos.

Example Character, Jotar son of Gunnar

Jotar was born to slave parents within the Holy Kingdom of Catla and spent twenty-five years chained to massive techno-magical machines that hauled stone and ore from the depths of a great mine. His father died to an overseer's whip, and his sisters were stolen from him in childhood – their faces now blurred by time and sorrow. Life had seemingly determined that he was to live and die under bondage as his family had for many generations, the only hope that carried him forward were the stories from his mother. Grand tales of his ancestors who lived in peace and solitude in the distant northern jungles; beyond the whips, cruelty, metal, magic and gods of so-called civilisation.

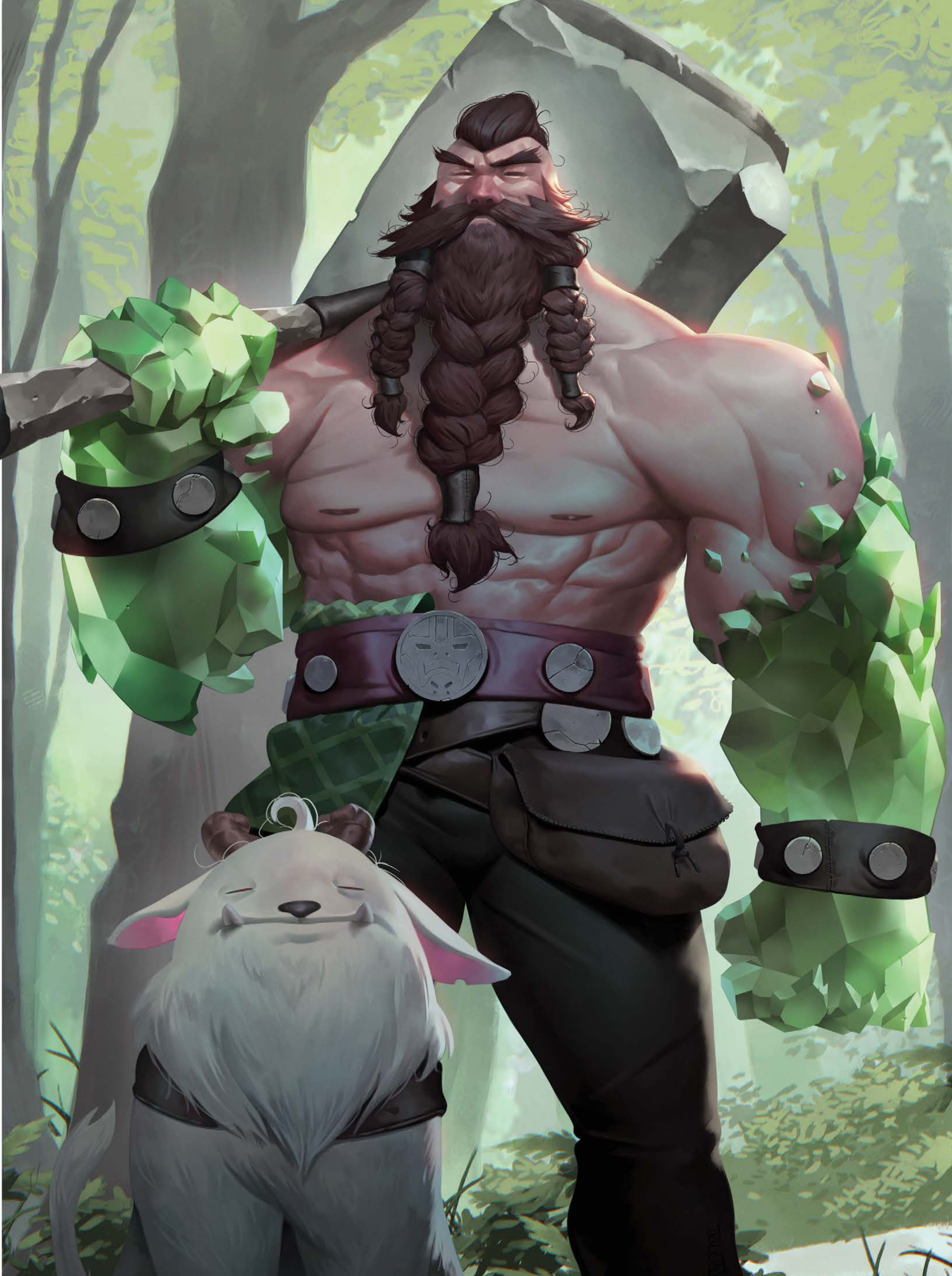
The harsh mines forged Jotar's arms into massive trunks of crystal and muscle – strength that found its true purpose when a band of Creet, Dracim and Remnant revolutionaries stormed the mines to free the enslaved. These new allies worshipped Jop Jop, the wild goddess of justice, and sought to bring civil war to the corrupt Holy Kingdom. They recruited the impressionable Jotar and placed a massive hammer in his hands to strike down their enemies, but in time he grew disgusted by their willingness to go to any lengths for their cause.

Jotar fled with his ageing mother to the neighbouring Kingdom of Ire, where they found solace among their fellow Creet. He set down his hammer, embracing a quiet life of raising and training animals – particularly those of the cute and fuzzy variety.

Though free and content, a restless passion flickered within. He did not agree with the methods of his former revolutionary companions, he yearned to live a life of impact, to see the world and aid those in need. That dormant passion was finally kindled to fire by the most unlikely of friends – a pampered Tolatl noble who seemingly worked as a mercenary to liven up his boring life.

Izel was everything Jotar was not, the kind of man he would have once dismissed without a second thought. Yet fate wove their paths together – through shared dangers, saving each other's lives more than once, and, most importantly, through a gift. A white-furred sekhound puppy named Rök, offered in friendship, sealed a bond deeper than either had ever known.

- Attributes:
  - Strength: ⬢⬢⬢⬢⬡
  - Mobility: ⬢⬢⬢⬡⬡
  - Intelligence: ⬢⬢⬡⬡⬡
  - Reflexes: ⬢⬢⬡⬡⬡
  - Focus: ⬢⬢⬢⬡⬡
  - Grit: ⬢⬢⬢⬢⬡
- Trained Skills:
  - Insight, Culture, Physical, Resolve, Construction, Forestry.
  - Brawn, Cunning.
- Traits: Carpenter (Construction), Huntsman (Forestry).
- Equipment:
  - Great Hammer (Primal), Cloth Outfit (Practical), Resplendent – Belt, Toolboxes (Construction & Forestry), Torch, Small Pet (Beast).



Overview

- See Dos write-up on pg: 184.

- Common Traits:
  - Arcane-Hunter (Resources), Pack Mule (Physical), Carpenter (Construction), Kindred (Monsters), Huntsman (Forestry).
- Common Equipment:
  - Non-magical weapons, hammers, shields, animal companions, non-metal outfits, stealth/construction/forestry toolboxes.

"Why place trust in the gods, fickle and capricious as they are? Their whims shape our destinies with neither rhyme nor reason, casting both blessings and curses upon mortals without heed to virtue or vice. The divine realm is a tapestry of envy, rivalry, and deceit, their petty squabbles mirroring our own but wielded with celestial power."

– King Hakon, son of Ingvar,
commentary on Eternal gods.

The malevolent god Dos – hailing from an unknown pantheon on a distant world – casts a dark shadow across the cosmos. With baleful intent, he traversed the great void to Akharon. His arrival was largely unnoticed by the Eternal gods, as was his vile influence that seeped into all that he touched.

Fueled by abyssal envy following Akh and Ath's creation of the Tolatl and Legion, he unleashed his wicked artistry, birthing the accursed firstborn Creet from alien crystals. These beings, crystalline and jagged, bore an eerie resemblance to the gems from which they were hewn, their forms shaped by Dos's dark mind. The evil god imbued these first Creet with his malice, envy and cruelty; they were to be a sentient embodiment of his evil spirit. They roamed the land during the wild Age of Darkness, leaving trails of ruin in their wake, sowing discord and misery wherever they tread. Their crystalline hearts pulsed with an insatiable hunger for power, driving them to steal the life force from all that stood in their way. As instruments of Dos's malevolence, these firstborn Creet possessed the dread ability to manipulate the very earth beneath them. With dark rituals, they tapped into molten streams, causing tremors and upheavals as they created the first volcanoes.

But Dos is a selfish god who is fickle and easily bored, with time he forgot his creations and moved on to new amusements. Left to their own devices and a diet of Akharon ore, the Creet grew and changed. Dos's neglect became their liberation and they hid from him so that he would think them dead. Over many years the Creet multiplied and their dark nature, power and crystalline forms diluted with each new generation. The Creet do not have the terrifying gifts that the firstborn commanded, but this is considered a favourable exchange for their freedom.

For almost a millennium, the Creet have dwelled in obscurity, leading tranquil lives beneath the earth and within secluded villages. Although they occasionally interacted with fey creatures and intelligent Neph Spawn, it wasn't them, gods or even the expansive Empire of Catla that unveiled them from their concealment. It was the formidable Archdruid and the brutal Drasong Clan who brought them forth into the light. Unfortunately, their paranoia and worse fears were made manifest, as they found themselves enslaved against their will to die in their master's wars, mines and mills.

Creet Nations

None known how many Creet nations beyond the known three are spread out accross Akharon, but all are sure there are more to discover.

Unveiled Creet

Those who live free lives in the Kingdom of Ire are known as the **Unveiled Creet**, and are primarily found in the central Crimson Crest mountain range under the rule of House Crystalis. They prefer to live in traditional semi-subterranean dwellings, are less fearful of the gods, embrace some techno-magic and have started to use family names in place of the traditional patronymic style of their ancestors. Their numbers grow with each year as they value family and help their kin escape bondage from the neighbouring Holy Kingdom of Catla and Drasong Clan.

Ashen Creet

The fierce **Ashen Creet** live among volcanic lands south of the Blood Stone Desert. Despite their revealed state, they refuse to leave as their volcanoes were created by their venerated ancestors to hide numerous Sacred Dens: hidden underground caverns that house dangerous divine artefacts and the entombed bodies of their dead. Many liberated Ashen Creet have returned to their ancestral home, risking the perilous journey across the northern desert or southern tundra. The people of this nation are known for their gruff nature, expert stone masons, and crimson, yellow, red and dark crystals.

Verdant Creet

These cunning Creet of the distant north live among jungle mountains and are renowned for their honour, exotic pets, archers, contact with fey Elves, and green, blue, purple and vibrant crystals. The Archdruid forced many of them through dark magic to march south in his war against civilisation. Those who remained abandoned their homes and sealed off their Sacred Dens to settle in new lands. Many wish to return to the homes of their forebears, but only after the Archdruid is dead. Those of Verdant heritage in the Kingdom of Ire are unable to return home, as the journey is too dangerous and their people are well hidden.

Crystal Eggs, Bones, Scars & Skin

Creet hatch from crystal eggs that can remain indefinitely dormant if not incubated. Their bones are lightweight porous crystals, and their skin crystalizes as it is scared or worn down from hard labour. Warriors will often have long crystal slices across their flesh from battle wounds, and labourers may have crystalized hands and forearms. They may also spontaneously develop glittering skin spots or the rare diamond-like eyes that are cautiously seen as a return of firstborn Creet power.

Majestic Hair

The firstborn Creet had bodies of pure crystal and were unable to grow hair. The Creet have long favoured majestic heads of hair on women and glorious beards on men, both are carefully groomed as they are a symbol of their people's separation from Dos.

Those of high social status may use gaudy head and beard wigs for official events. Criminals and the disgraced are shaved bald.

Distrust of Gods, Magic & Metal

Creet distrust of the gods, great beings, magic and metal is the cornerstone of their ancient culture. Ashen and Verdant Creet spend most of their lives in hidden towns that are dotted with semi-subterranean houses that are carefully planned around natural environments to hide them from the heavens. Caves, mountains and dense foliage are popular choices. All in an effort to prevent the gods from taking an interest in them and mucking them about with their selfish and foolish schemes that often end in tragedy.

The parallels between this guiding ideology and religion are not lost on many scholars. The Creet have a range of philosophical texts that teach ethical values and make predictions of world-ending doom, priest-like **Obscurists** who ensure community compliance and perform many social rituals, zealots who take things too far and a range of god-warding runes.

While Unveiled Creet may not hold these values to the same extreme as their ancestors, they still embrace a wide range of customs that have seeped into their subconscious. They feel slightly more inclined to move about at night, travel when it rains, perform indoor work during sunny days, wear hats coloured like dirt or foliage, and avoid carrying large lanterns. Their beautiful homes have roof gardens, deep cellars and almost no metal. When they reluctantly use techno-magic or metallic items they mutter about the god of both elements (Pol) being dead and no longer causing trouble.

Sacred Dens & Tombs

At the heart of the oldest Creet settlements are the Sacred Dens, ancient caverns with walls of metal that are filled with divine artefacts of power and surrounded by labyrinthian carved stone tunnels of entombed Creet. They are secured by deadly traps, an intricate maze and alarms that call upon guards or release monsters.

These Dens are thought to be the birthing chambers that were used by Dos to create the firstborn Creet. They were unable to destroy these Dens or tamper with their contents without attracting the attention of the gods or their servants. Their greatest fear is that Dos will regain a Sacred Den and create new firstborn that will taint Akharon and the Creet with his evil spirit once again. No one, not even the priestly Obscurists, may enter the inner metal sanctums of the Sacred Dens.

» **Truth:** Sacred Dens are spacecraft that were buried by the first Creet to avoid attracting Mechonids or Nephilim.

Secret Insight

» See Fragged Empire 2 Setting Guide book for a full write up on the expanded sci-fi setting.

The Creet were genetically engineered by the Archons to be a stepping stone on the path to creating a true silicon-based species. They were given their own nation that spanned multiple star systems and were renowned for their durability and capacity to flourish on harsh worlds with limited resources.

When the X'ion War began, the Creet were quick to adapt and held back Nephilim aggressors on multiple fronts. As their allies crumbled they were slowly surrounded and worn down. Believing all others to be dead, they sent out thousands of refugee convoys in a last-ditch effort for their species to survive, hoping against all odds that a few would escape and find a new home far from the Nephilim.

One such convoy arrived on Akharon, and discovered a remote and uncolonized world where Mechonids had defeated an unknown Nephilim army. The deadly robots were slumbering and the remaining Nephilim were mostly feral beasts, but both posed a significant danger to the desperate Creet who were ecstatic just to be alive.

The Creet spread themselves out across the planet and buried their spacecraft (in what would come to be known as Sacred Dens). In the coming years, they destroyed or buried most of their advanced technology and hid away in caves and secret villages to avoid detection from Akharon's many threats. These dangers grew over the following century as the planet was further infected with psionic nanites (creating enchanters and Fey), ghostly echoes (Wraiths) and otherworldly energy beings known as Faren (Ethereal Spirits).

The Creet became obsessed with the need to hide and developed a robust culture that shunned 'gods and their magic'. They even remained hidden during the years when the planet was colonized by the spacefaring Corp, Kaltoran, Remnant and Twi-Far. All outsiders were seen as a threat, and the Archon known as Domios (a name that fed into the myth of the Eternal god Dos) who had led the team that created the Creet became demonized as a villain.

* * *

Dos is a insane Palantor MVP or Mechonid who lives within a massive swarm of psionic nanites.

Dracim

The great dragons ruled much of the early Age of Darkness and slumbered for a thousand years until the Druidic War awoke them with the irresistible scent of wylding magic: the glowing green power of the late goddess Neph that turned the Archdruid and the dragon Languorem into demigods. Carving out a warped realm for himself, Languorem created the Dracim to be hatched from dragon queen eggs to work in his new nation as disposable slaves. Many other great dragon kings have purchased this power from Languorem with vows of loyalty and gifts of wylding so that they too may create their own servile people.

Languorem has long used the Dracim to extract resources, craft tools and wage war against his rivals. Tens of thousands of his Dracim have been captured and enslaved by the Holy Kingdom of Catla and the Drasong Clan. Many under Catla rule were liberated by the civil war that formed the Kingdom of Ire and did not wish to return to their brutal creator.

The Dracim produce very few eggs of their own and without dragon queens they were doomed to fade away. Their salvation arrived when the king of Ire permitted three nestless dragon princesses (Frey, Hail and Gullv) to roost in his capital city of Kethwick. Their integration into the kingdom has been tumultuous, but the eggs they provide have stabilised the Dracim of Ire and allowed them to move towards a future beyond the tyranny of dragons.

- **Species Stats:**
  - +1 Leadership and Monsters.
  - +1 to all Acquisition Rolls.
  - +2 End Dmg, all Weapons.
  - -2 max Reflexes.
  - Complication: Neph's Decline and prejudice from many people.

- **Common Characteristics:**
  - Adaptable, fierce, mysterious, sceptical, thoughtful.
  - Free Dracim are often keen to not be seen as monsters.

  - Average Life: 59 years.
  - Long tail-like appendages from their head.
  - Coloured scaled skin, physical features and innate powers that reflect the nature of their parents.
  - Diet: Preference for meat.

- **Example First Names:**
  - Alaric (m), Baldur (m), Dagmar (f), Edda (f), Egil (m), Freya (f), Fridolin (m), Gertrude (f), Gunther (m), Hrothgar (m), Ingmar (m), Kriemhild (f), Leif (m), Luitgard (f), Sigrid (f).
- **Example Family Names:**
  - Dracim born to dragon queens are often adopted into families of similar physical natures and will take on their name.
  - Blue Storm, Iron Scale, Magmari, Nox, Sharp Claw.

- **Demigod Creator:** Languorem.

Example Character, Sigrid Oldscale

Unlike many Dracim, Sigrid was not hatched from a dragon egg but was born to Dracim parents, a point of great pride for her mother. Her early years were moderately comfortable, but she barely remembers them, as their family fell to ruin when her father died in a hunting accident. Left destitute, she and her mother were forced to relocate to the slums of Smok, where they came to know hunger better than warmth.

Even as a small girl, Sigrid rose to the challenges of her situation, especially when her half-sister Gwenyr was born. She took on the duties of the house, taught herself to read, defended her sister against street thugs and worked as a basket weaver – all before the age of twelve. Sigrid's iron will and sharp mind caught the attention of a travelling wylding wielder, a magic user with power over both flesh and plants. Dropping a pouch of gold into her greedy stepfather's hands, Sigrid was taken away to learn the art of wielding deep within the Twisted Forest.

Her time among the wylding coven would have been considered gruelling by most people's standards, but it was a luxury for a slum rat child. Wylding is seen as an evil form of magic by most, as it can be grotesque, is closely associated with evil druids who had almost destroyed civilisation and the ruthless – but now dead – goddess Neph. The students were first and foremost taught to harvest wylding from nature and to use it to heal. They journeyed to distant villages and towns in need, softening prejudices toward their art with each life saved.

As expected, Sigrid applied herself with a skill and determination that marked her out above her fellow pupils. Within a decade she grew to become a formidable wielder, specialising in fungimancy. Having earned the freedom to travel, she quickly returned home in search of her mother and sister. She quickly learned that her mother had passed away and her sister had last been seen running with a local street gang.

Desperate to reconnect with her sister, Sigrid tracked her south across the realm to a seedy bar on the outskirts of the city of Valeur. They stared at each other in disbelief, both shadows of who they once were – Sigrid a strong and powerful wielder, Gwenyr a drunk and angry monk.

- **Attributes:**
  - **Strength:** ⬢⬢⬡⬡⬡
  - **Mobility:** ⬢⬢⬢⬡⬡
  - **Intelligence:** ⬢⬢⬢⬢⬡
  - **Reflexes:** ⬢⬢⬡⬡⬡
  - **Focus:** ⬢⬢⬢⬢⬡
  - **Grit:** ⬢⬢⬢⬡⬡
- **Trained Skills:**
  - Leadership, Resolve, Apothecary, Monsters, Forestry, Pathfinding.
  - Finesse, Cunning.
- **Traits:** Wylding Wielder (Resources), Intimidating (Leadership).
- **Equipment:**
  - Walking Stick (Club, Weighty), Fungizombie Seeds (Group – Warrior), Cloth Outfit (Primal Garb), Luminescent Spores (Great Torch), Toolboxes (Apothecary and Monsters).

Overview

- See Dragon write-up from pg: 132.
- See Warped Kingdom write-up on pg: 128.

- Common Traits:
  - Wylding Wielder (Resources), Tooth & Claw (Reflexes), Mighty Roar (Focus), Divine Tail (Apothecary), Trophy Hunter (Monsters), Single Out (Cunning).
- Common Equipment:
  - Innate weapons, magic - fire (burn) weapons, blades, hunting bow, glaive, explosive power, brigandine, chainmail, monster toolbox.

"We know we are a beastial race of claws, teeth and scales. Creatures of nightmare, making children cry and soldiers clutch their spears. Born of Languorem, that most vile of godless dragons. But do not think us devoid of heart or a longing for both peace and place. We bleed as you bleed, feel as you feel. Give us a chance and we shall repay your trust tenfold."

– Master Baldur Blackscale,
Let Us Be Your Beast, Vol IX.

The Dracim are the youngest of the intelligent species and were created by the demigod dragon king Languorem to be little more than disposable slaves. Despite this, many have broken free of their bondage and are flourishing in the Kingdom of Ire as both lords and peasants. They are an adaptable and deep-thinking people, traits that they have developed to ensure their survival in a world that sees them as either a threat to be killed or a tool to be used.

Most Dracim within Ire live under the rule of the Great House Tredeki and have learned that becoming a functional part of society is the fastest path to cultural acceptance. Though many – especially Kaltorans – are unable to see past their ferocious appearance and will denounce them as monsters. Those who follow the All-Faith religion are particularly accepting of them, along with some Creet and Remnant who share their history of bondage. It is not uncommon for Dracim to be turned out of stores or away from employment, this has made it particularly difficult for them to improve their social standings out of the lower classes.

Some have turned to the northern frontiers as a means to elevate their fortunes. A Dracim's natural armaments make them effective warriors and guardians who can push back monsters to make way for fields, lumber mills and houses. Those who flourish in these harsh lands are able to direct their fierce nature and think through complex problems with patience. Those who are unable to find their place have often failed to tame their inner beast and allowed themselves to wallow in social isolation.

Dracim families are close-knit and will often live in eclectic multi-generational homes, with new rooms and floors added with each new marriage or child. The birth of a Dracim is a particularly joyous occasion that will draw attention and gifts from all nearby Dracim families.

Physical Variance & Dragon Kings

Dracim are an imposing species with mouths of sharp teeth, clawed hands and scaled hides. They are also a people of great physical variance, with some gifted with wings, the capacity to breathe out magical attacks or able to shrug off weapons with natural armour. These, along with their colour and other physical features, all stem from their heritage.

While all Dracim can trace their lineage back to one of six great dragon kings, there are also a few minor dragon kings who have sired clutches of Dracim eggs and many mother queens. Dracim may also breed with each other, though they produce fewer and smaller eggs.

Eclipsion (Cosmic)
His rare Dracim are notable for their scales that are speckled with colour, long limbs and magic-nullification powers. Some are even rumoured to have the ability to nudge fate. Almost nothing is known about this enigmatic dragon king from the distant north.

Emberax (Fire & Smoke)
His dark-scaled Dracim are fast and often breathe out smoke or flame. He is allied with the western giants and a small number of his offspring have attacked the coastlines of the Holy Kingdom of Catla.

Languorem (Mutation)
His Dracim are common, have purple scales and are weaker than others of their kind when they are young. Those that survive will grow in power as their bodies mutate and change to adapt to their environment and desires: such as developing wings, muscle bulk or any kind of dangerous arcane breath. His Dracim eggs also defy convention as they require no environment control and hatch into quadruplets or triplets.

Nelthrezad (Death & Water)
His Dracim never fly, but have webbed limbs, fish-like fins and can occasionally breathe out deathly fog. Their small scales are often silver, blue or grey, and their eyes are large. His Dracim are rare in the Kingdom of Ire as they are primarily waging war against Emberax and the giants in the far west.

Psychrosis (Air & Ice)
His Dracim have thick white or grey scales, large claws and they can occasionally breathe out a freezing mist. They are moderately common in Ire as their dragon king is a short ways off to the south battling the Southern Legion Tribes.

Terratorse (Life & Poison)
His green and brown Dracim are common in the northern lands and easily identified by their horned heads, body spines and bulk. They rarely fly but many can spit barbs, bleed poisonous blood and have gifts of healing. A few have even been known to explode when they suffer a mortal wound.

Vorathor (Fire & Metal)
This great dragon king is enslaved by the Drasong Clan in the eastern Blood Stone Desert and has not produced any Dracim.

Neph's Decline

This dreaded affliction plagues all Neph Spawn, including Dracim and even dragons. It begins insidiously, with subtle memory lapses and impulsive behaviour. Over time, afflicted individuals gradually lose their cognitive faculties and regress into a feral state that is reminiscent of a beast. The only known way to avoid its pull is to be ruled by a greater child of Neph; such as a royal dragon, powerful wylding wielder, strong Dracim noble or the demigod King of Ire who wields the divine spear of Neph.

Young dragons are double-cursed, as this feral state also transforms them into lesser draconic creatures. A prince will become a wingless drake and a princesses a frenzied wyvern. Dragon kings and queens are cruel parents who will force their dragon offspring to devolve so that they may be used as guards and beasts of burden.

Queens of Kethwick

» See Kethwick write-up on pg: 90.

Three wild princesses who had fled their home nests were doomed to devolve into wyverns, but were saved by the King of Ire who permitted them to roost in the gigantic Grateful Oak that dominates his capital city of Kethwick; an ancient wylding-tree that has allowed them to maintain their bodies and minds.

Frey (Fire, daughter of Vorathor)
A social butterfly, Frey thrives on connections and loves gatherings. She negotiated peace with the King of Ire.

Hail (Lightning, daughter of Psychrosis)
A bookworm at heart, Hail finds comfort in solitude.

Gullv (Death, daughter of Terratorse)
A fearless adventurer, Gullv loves to travel and explore. She is the one who gathered the three princesses together.

Egg Carts

Every few months dozens of armoured wagons travel across the land of Ire from the city of Kethwick with a precious cargo; large Dracim eggs from the three dragon queens. These are carefully allocated to select communities that have low birth rates, and local mayors are responsible for managing their distribution.

Dragon queens only need to mate once in life to produce Dracim eggs if they have access to a source of wylding. After three months a well cared for egg will hatch into an adolescent Dracim who will mature to adulthood within four years. Eggs that are born to Dracim parents are rare, small and have an incubation period of one year. They hatch into a baby Dracim who will take almost two decades to mature into adulthood.

Secret Insight

» See Fragged Empire 2 Setting Guide book for a full write up on the expanded sci-fi setting.

The Nephilim deployed an army to Akharon to uncover a number of secret Archon weapon laboratories (that were creating super soldiers code-named 'Angel'), these were in turn counter assaulted by Mechonid robots. Dragons are a form of Nephilim Genocrat that outlived almost all other Genocrats due to their impressive genetic engineering.

Despite killing the last Archon on the planet, the Nephilim were losing their war with the Mechonids. Dragons are exceptionally selfish creatures and they sacrificed much of their remaining forces to allow themselves time to burrow into the planet's many caves to hibernate. They did not arise until the Archdruid made use of large amounts of biotechnology (known as wylding) that triggered sensors that were designed to detect Nephilim reinforcements.

When the dragons arose they learned that the Mechonids were also slumbering and that all non-dragon Nephilim on the planet had mentally degraded into a feral bestial state (known as Neph's Decline). They themselves were starting to suffer the effects of mental degradation despite their dormancy.

All of the great dragon kings fought in the X'ion war against the Archons, but most have foggy memories or minds that have been reworked by psionic nanites that infest the planet. They dragons moved to gather organic technology (which they were also calling wylding at the time) to heal their minds and strengthen their atrophied bodies. Languorem secured a large amount of wylding that was deployed to the planet by a feral Nephilim warship that orbited the planet (known as the goddess Neph). This deployment included mobile laboratories, weapons and mutagenic fluid. The warship had detected the Genocrat dragons and was sending aid.

* * *

Due to psionic nanites and mental frailty during hibernation the dragons now all accept the false history of Akharon and its Eternal gods. They believe they once ruled much of the planet during a so-called Age of Darkness, and that they were the favoured children of the now-dead goddess Neph.

Languorem is the one exception and knows the truth. Despite appearances, he has little interest in the nations of Akharon and is seeking to defeat the true enemies that are keeping the planet in an isolated and technologically devolved state; nanites (psionics did not exist during the X'ion War) and the sleeping Mechonids. He does not know of the Eden Brood, Haven system or how the other species arrived on Akharon. Languorem genetically engineered the Dracim using existing Nephilim designs that he tweaked with his own draconic DNA and local lifeforms. Dracim are not pure Nephilim.

Kaltoran

Born with the memories of their ancestors, Kaltorans are innately skilled and commonly maintain deep familial bonds. Throughout Akharon's long and complex history they have frequently formed the backbone of many nations' workforce of farmers, craftsmen and scholars. They are also responsible for the modernisation of the Ta'Di religion, adapting its animistic beliefs with mainstream Eternal religious doctrine.

So important are the family skills of a Kaltoran that they will often marry for the cultivation of these memories over love, even among the peasantry. But with so many generations of managed procreation, they can struggle with vocations outside of their fields of expertise. They are a specialised people that tumble and crack if their established processes are broken.

History is replete with legends of great Kaltoran knights who were unmatched in combat, techno-mages that opened up new paths of arcane inquiry, master blacksmiths who forged legendary blades and farming families that cultivated great harvests during droughts. But also of dark family secrets coming to light when a child gained their ancestral memories, craftsmen unable to adapt to new technologies and ancient blood-soaked grudges that can never die.

- **Species Stats:**
  - +1 Sophistication, Awareness and two other Skills.
  - +1 Grit Re-Roll point.
  - Visibility Cover -1, all Weapons.
  - You share memories with your ancestors:
    - May use Skills to perform Ancestral Memory Arcane Rolls (see Rule book, pg: 35).
  - Increase all Untrained Skill Roll penalties by 1 (normally -2).
  - Complication: Prejudiced (grudge, rivalry, hatred, etc...) against a group of people or type of monster.

- **Common Characteristics:**
  - Adventurous, family-focused, skilled, unforgiving.
  - Often nostalgic and strongly attached to family.

  - Average Life: 108 years.
  - Four pointed ears.
  - Dreadlock hair.
  - Light to dark brown skin tones.
  - Diet: Preference for ancestrally nostalgic food.

- **Example First Names:**
  - Aaron (m), Abigail (f), Adam (m), Benjamin (m), David (m), Elijah (m), Esther (f), Isaiah (m), Jacob (m), Joshua (m), Leah (f), Miriam (f), Naomi (f), Rachel (f), Ruth (f), Samuel (m).
- **Example Family Names:**
  - Highborn Kaltorans have distinctive self-styled ancestral family names while lowborns have family vocation names.
  - Butcher, Hunter, Shepherd, Whiteapple, Youngfield.

- **Eternal God Creator:** Dray (+Etso, Fik and Jop Jop).

Example Character, Salome Tiller

Born into a long line of farmers as the middle child of nine, Salomen lived the simple life of a peasant, where duty began before dawn and ended long after dusk. She learned to tend livestock and weave cloth before she could read, her hands growing calloused from toil. Yet, despite the hardships of labour, she knew the warmth of familial love and the strength of a close-knit community. Seldom did a month pass without a family gathering or a village festival in honour of an Eternal god.

Salome's parents matched her with a quiet boy from two towns over - the son of a thud cow farmer. They wed, and soon after she bore a daughter. All was well until a plague spread throughout the land, taking the lives of her family while leaving her untouched.

With tear-filled eyes, she cried out to the gods, great spirits, and any powerful being that would listen. The great Nix - goddess of the afterlife, trickery, and enchantment - heeded her plea and offered to return her family if she vowed to serve her. Salome agreed without hesitation, and in a swirl of purple smoke, time reversed, returning her home a week before the plague.

Her husband loved and trusted her, and with very few questions agreed to take the family away to visit a distant relative, far from the coming disaster. Once her family was safe, her mind blanked, and she awoke in a faraway land, miles and months away from them.

Now, cursed never to see her husband or daughter again, Salome's mind blanks out without notice when Nix needs her, forcing her to act as her puppet to complete all manner of tasks.

Over time, filled with the goddess's magic, Salome became a powerful enchantress. This enhanced her usefulness to Nix, but also granted her some autonomy, as she can now resist her mistress when she steels her mind.

- **Attributes:**
  - **Strength:** ⬢⬢⬡⬡⬡
  - **Mobility:** ⬢⬢⬢⬡⬡
  - **Intelligence:** ⬢⬢⬢⬢⬡
  - **Reflexes:** ⬢⬢⬢⬢⬡
  - **Focus:** ⬢⬢⬡⬡⬡
  - **Grit:** ⬢⬢⬢⬡⬡
- **Trained Skills:**
  - Persuasion, Insight, Culture, Awareness, Awareness, Stealth.
  - Finesse, Cunning.
- **Traits:** Enchanter (Resources), Mind Haze (Persuasion).
- **Equipment:**
  - Unstoppable Power (Magic - Cosmic (Guide) and Techno-Tome), Padded Outfit (Esoteric Garb), Grimoire - Personal, Toolboxes (Persuasion, Insight and Stealth).

Overview

- Common Traits:
  - Educated (Intelligence), Lucky (Grit), Stewardship (Wealth), Charming (Persuasion), Deal Hunter (Culture), Hatred (Resolve), Keen Senses (Awareness), Ranger (Forestry).
- Common Equipment:
  - Swords, spear, warbow, billhook, chain shirt, great stag mount, divine whetstone, potion (air - smoke), culture/sophistication/awareness/resolve toolboxes.

"Joshua waved farewell to his family who had gathered by the docks to see him off. His mother, father, brothers, sisters, nieces, nephews and his one remaining grandparent. Three generations who'd never lived outside their village, and twenty more of ancestral memories steeped in farming and home-keeping. His new life in a new land would not come easy, but those memories were not just of work and toil, but also of love, endurance and survival. His entire bloodline had prepared him for this journey."

– Departure of Adam Longplow.

During the early years of the Age of Creation when Akharon was a sparse world without night or day (as the sun gods Akh and Ath had not yet been formed), the creator god Mon walked barefoot upon its dimly lit surface with his toddler son Dray. Mon, a devoted father, had embarked on a quest to uncover the nascent passions of his little one who was absent-minded and without divine purpose.

They wandered through mountain ranges, where the whispers of the earth tickled their senses and Dray collected curious rocks. Beneath grand trees, his tiny fingers reached for the dancing branches, revealing an affinity for beauty as he plucked the finest of leaves. As Mon and Dray ventured by a babbling brook, the gurgling melody sparked ideas within the child's mind, reflecting untapped gifts as he used his stones and leaves to create a damn.

Mon observed Dray's wide-eyed wonder as the world unfolded before them. In this tender moment, Mon saw that his son was a creator of a different kind to him. Not making from nothing, but a craftsman who could unlock great potential from materials formed by others. Mon asked three of his children – the wild Etso, shy Fik and rambunctious Jop Jop – to bring their finest objects to him. To their surprise (and not immediate pleasure), Mon mixed Etso's wine, a fateful star of Fik and the Great Spirit of family from Jo Jop with Dray's damp leaves and rocks to create the Kaltorans, second-born of the intelligent species of Akharon after the Remnant.

Ancestral Memories

All Kaltorans have the mixed blessing of carrying the memories of their ancestors. Gifting them with skills and wisdom that were built up over many lifetimes, but also binding them to old thought patterns, grudges, and haunting them with the terrors of past wars. Change does not come easily to a Kaltoran, though they are responsible for much of Akharon's development due to their ability to look back to when the Eternal gods walked Akharon and gifted mortals with techno-magic.

Numerous & Varied People

The Kaltorans are the most numerous of all intelligent species on Akharon and are well-represented in most nations. Particularly within the Kingdom of Ire, Holy Kingdom of Catla and the Panos Theocracy. They hold influence within all tiers of society, from the lowest peasant to royal courtiers. Their families are often large, well-connected, skilled, industrious and are able to single-handly maintain the cultural distinctiveness of an entire people for many generations.

Duchy of Valdis (Kingdom of Ire)

House Valdis are the most renowned and proudest of all noble Kaltoran families, as they are both an ancient lineage and paragons of ability. Their duchy occupies a mountainous eastern realm of the Kingdom of Ire and is a land outside of time that is filled with quaint villages, wineries, little techno-magic and is guarded by the famous Red Chevalier knights.

- Favour brightly coloured clothing.
- Compact stone houses with cellars.
- Strong tradition of alchemy and brewing.
- Few guilds and almost no merchant class.

Western Arm (Holy Kingdom of Catla)

The houses of Bard & Boon are allies in a war against the Giants of Tilward who have travelled across the Gale Sea to destroy and plunder their lands. Those under House Bard are born survivors and skilled warriors, while those of the House of Boon are renowned scholars and engineers. Cut off from support by the royal House of Catla, in desperation the Duchess Ruth Boon has turned to the vampiric Vacubus bloodline for aid.

- Favour simple clothing and colours.
- Multistoried houses with overhanging upper floors.
- Tattoos are common.
- Vampires, witch hunters and giants threaten their lands.

Nios County (Holy Kingdom of Catla)

Despite their diminished power, House Apollonios maintain a distinct position within the Eternal Priesthood as they were the source of much that is known about the gods. Situated in the perilous Twisted Forest, their Nios County is a realm where its resilient inhabitants hunt and gather for their food, combat monsters and unearth ancient divine artefacts for trade.

- Favour thick clothing made of hides and bone.
- Long hair.
- Worship the Eternal gods in old and primal styles.

Panos Theocracy

The distant Panos Theocracy is a unique and isolated nation from across the vast Blood Stone Desert who are ruled by priests to the Eternal gods. Their lands are lush, beautiful and replete with both techno-magic marvels and grand temples. All carefully watched over by a network of Invigilator agents.

- Favour robes, scarves and muted tones.
- Wood houses with narrow frontages and deep interiors.
- Value meditation.
- Suspicious of outsiders and other religions, especially Ta'Di.
- Access to advanced techno-magic.

Briffan Islands (Kraken Isle)
The Salt Folk are hardy people who regularly raid the coastlines of the Sea of Fog. Their best cannons and guns are provided by the small Briffan Coalition who are a faction of Kaltorans and Tolatl who have made their home in the divine ruins of a great structure that was dedicated to the goddess Corp.

- Favour thick leather clothing and dark hues.
- Decorate their hair with charms and trinkets.
- Many exceptional gunsmiths.

Family is Everything

Family comes before anything else for most Kaltorans: they live and work for their families and if necessary die and kill for their families. New family ties are created through marriage and adoption, both of which are celebrated with large ceremonies.

Kaltoran partners are valued for not only traditional qualities such as personality, wealth and beauty, but also skills, mental health and wisdom. It is also not uncommon for them to have children later in life. This has the advantage of providing children with mature memories from well-established parents, but with the downside of having less energy for their upbringing. As Kaltoran families commonly have ten or more children, it is a necessity for them to be raised by a large number of relatives and friends.

Feuds & Grudges

Rivalries and feuds are common, as old grudges are reignited with each new generation, especially if they are between two Kaltoran households. Their ancestral memories guarantee that any significant slight will not be forgotten and some families have grudges that go back over two hundred years. The only way to heal such ancestral pain is with an equally powerful positive memory that can be passed on to a new generation.

Religious Influence

Arguably, none have shaped the religions of Akharon more than the Kaltorans. For it was they who revealed the mysteries of the Eternal gods to the ancient Empire of Catla, it was they who are the guardians of the sacred 'Di' river for the Ta'Di, and it was they who created the Reformed Ta'Di religion by synchronizing its animistic beliefs with Eternal doctrine.

While the Eternal gods can change their appearances, many artistic representations show them to be Kaltoran-like in their natural state. This is not only due to the foundational influence of House Apollonios on the former Empire of Catla, but also because many of Akharon's greatest artists are Kaltorans.

Secret Insight

- See Fragged Empire 2 Setting Guide book for a full write up on the expanded sci-fi setting.

The Kaltorans were genetically engineered by the Archons, and were favoured by them for their skills. Their society spanned across many star systems, but was hyper-specialized and crumbled during the X'ion War against the Nephilim. To survive, they burrowed underground beneath an ocean on a planet called Kadash. They unfortunately did not bring enough supplies and were forced to turn to cannibalism to survive. They were eventually awoken by another species that went by the name Corp, and returned to the stars shortly after.

Their ability to transfer memories to their offspring became a curse as each new generation was forced to experience the horrors of both the X'ion War and what their ancestors did to survive the aftermath. Eager to replace their memories with positive experiences, they journeyed out from Kadash, settled new worlds and explored the galaxy.

The Kaltorans arrived on Akharon after the Corporation, and created multiple farming and mining colonies. They survived the technological decline of the planet by reverting back to a survival-first tribalistic state. The Kaltorans had fewer colonists than the other species, but their keen survival instincts and large families allowed them to flourish and grow in number. Over time they became more akin to their pre-X'ion War hyper-specialized cultural state.

* * *

Before the technological collapse of the planet, a group of Kaltorans were desperate to heal their traumatic genetic memories. These Kaltorans would eventually come to be known as Elves, and they infected themselves and their children with modified psionic nanites that were programmed to remove undesirable memories and ideas. The endeavour was initially successful, but the nanites took too much of their children's minds and developed a personality of their own. The nanites came to believe in magic, a fantastical history of Akharon and gods. They started to modify other wild nanites and reprogram technology and people's minds to match their sense of reality.

Kaltorans and psions were particularly susceptible to this reprogramming, and those who would become the people of House Apollonios who were the worst affected. In a twist of fate, these nanites are also responsible for keeping the Mechonids (Children of Pol) asleep, possibly saving the lives of all people on Akharon had they and their factories awoken in large numbers.

* * *

Kaltorans have also played a vital role in techno-magic as their genetic memories have allowed some to meditate back thousands of years to faintly glimpse how technology works.

Legion

As a physically imposing species with a strong disposition towards conflict, the Legion commonly find themselves drawn to military roles both physical and tactical. It was they who formed the backbone of the unstoppable army of the Empire of Catla that conquered the world's largest continent, and they are often the guards of towns and nobles. But not all Legion are the servants of masters, some are the heads of ancient great houses, wise Ta'Di seers who seek the wisdom of spirits or skilled tribal warriors who wrestled control of the wild southern tundras from Jötnar giants, frenzied frost Trolls and the mighty dragon Psychrosis

All Legion share a desire to be warriors, and those who choose alternative paths must tame their inner fire with discipline and other physical activities. Many Legion choose to work in frontier colonies, intermittently fighting off monsters and raiders between the tilling of fields and building of homes. These brave settlers are rewarded with deeds to fertile land and the respect of those who enjoy the safety that is secured by their blood and sweat.

- **Species Stats:**
  - +1 Physical, Resolve and Brawn.
  - +1 Armour.
  - May function without air for 5 minutes a day and in arctic (cold temperature, walking on ice or through thick snow, etc…) environments without penalty.
  - -2 max Mobility.
  - Weak at 0 Endurance (-1 Armour).
  - Complication: Inner Fire.

- **Common Characteristics:**
  - Honourable, loyal, organised, protective, proud.
  - Often keen to live lives of physical action.

  - Average Life: 62 years.
  - Thick hided skin.
  - Often large and muscular.
  - Diet: Preference for large and hardy meals.

- **Example First Names:**
  - Aeneas (m), Agatha (f), Apollo (m), Ariadne (f), Augustus (m), Calpurnia (f), Demetrius (m), Dido (f), Hector (m), Livia (f), Marcus (m), Medea (f), Octavia (f), Orestes (m), Penelope (f), Perseus (m), Portia (f), Theseus (m), Valeria (f).
- **Example Family Names:**
  - Aemilianus, Catullus, Euphrates, Fabius, Galerius, Lucullus, Nereus, Octavius, Plautius.

- **Family Names:**
  - Inspired by a geographic feature that indicates a family's place of origin or association. Such as Arcby (for Arcane Bay). City names are reserved for nobles and building names for families with institutional renown.

- **Eternal God Creator:** Ath.

Example Character, Lady Hera Rubis

Despite her noble lineage, Hera's childhood was marked by sorrow when her father was slain and she was taken captive by Southern Legion raiders. For years she was raised in slavery as a thrall among the arctic snow drifts of The White Expanse. Despite her situation, she trained in secret to wield an axe and grew into a strong and resilient woman. Fueled by a thirst for freedom and vengeance, Hera's spirit was never broken and she vowed to return home to reclaim her rightful place.

Her salvation came not by mortal hands, but through the divine intervention of Jop Jop – the wild goddess of justice. Moved by her plight, she blessed Hera with temporary great strength to break the doors that locked her and many other thralls in at night. They were to escape to the ocean and steal a ship to return to their homeland.

Overcome by bloodlust, Hera did not escort her fellow thralls and turned towards the centre of the town to kill the local Jarl and his soldiers. When Hera arrived at the shores of the sea covered in the blood of her enemies, she found her fellow slaves dead – killed by soldiers who were guarding the docks, whom she dispatched with ease.

During her long journey home Hera fell into a great sleep and her dreams were filled with the squabbles of gods and goddesses. Some praised her actions as both noble and thrilling, while others condemned her for abandoning the weaker thralls in her thirst for vengeance. Yet, amidst the celestial discord, Jop Jop remained aloof and uninterested, for justice had been applied. The tyrant Jarl was dead, and the soldiers who had murdered the thralls at the docks had met their end.

Upon her return, Hera reintegrated effortlessly into the Kingdom of Ire and the Duchy of Rubis, as her Legion kin celebrated her strength and victories. When she came of age, she was formally dubbed a Radiant Knight, marked out as a holy warrior in the service of Jop Jop and the crown. Clad in techno-magical armour, with a mighty Radiant Axe in hand, Hera became a figure of fear and awe. Her enemies tremble before her as she delivers justice with unwavering force and unrelenting vigour.

- **Attributes:**
  - Strength: ⬢⬢⬢⬢⬢
  - Mobility: ⬢⬢⬡⬡⬡
  - Intelligence: ⬢⬢⬡⬡⬡
  - Reflexes: ⬢⬢⬢⬡⬡
  - Focus: ⬢⬢⬢⬡⬡
  - Grit: ⬢⬢⬢⬡⬡
- **Trained Skills:**
  - Leadership, Culture, Physical, Resolve, Metallurgy, Monsters.
  - Finesse, Brawn.
- **Traits:** Massive (Strength), Hatred (Resolve).
- **Equipment:**
  - Battle Axe & Shield (Magic – Metal (Forge)), Battleworn Plate (Banded, Sturdy), Focus – Holy Icon, Toolboxes (Leadership and Resolve), Torch.

Overview

- Common Traits:
  - Massive (Strength), Solid Build (Mobility), Marshall (Leadership), Warrior Tradition (Sophistication), Perseverance (Physical), Armourer (Metallurgy), Sailor (Pathfinding),
- Common Equipment:
  - Large weapons, axes, mace, halberd, shields, heavy outfits, resplendent - breastplate, potion (cosmic - shield), physical/resolve toolboxes.

"Throughout history, the Legion have been called forth repeatedly to take up the blade for war and the hammer for industry. It is their muscles and hardened will that have built every great nation.

Within the hearts of all Legion is a fire to defend civilisation, and a spark to restart it if needed. They are the goddess Ath's safeguard against the darkness of ignorance and Neph."

– Lady Dido Rubis,
Founding of Nations, Vol II.

The Legion were created in secret by Ath - red sun goddess of wisdom, war and loyalty - alongside the Tolatl against the wishes of the powerful Neph - goddess of nature. The Legion and Tolatl have always been seen as the twin foundational pillars of civilisation; the Tolatl its ruler and the Legion its guardian.

It was Legion might that conquered the entire continent for the Empire of Catla and brought about the Age of Illumination, Legion muscle that pushed back the wilds after the Druidic War to allow the formation of the Kingdoms of Catla and Ire, and it is Legion endurance that holds the inhospitable southern tundras. Again and again, the Legion are called forth to place their bodies between civilisation and a return to the primal Age of Darkness.

Inner Fire

The Legion were created during a time when Akharon was ruled by great monsters. The very idea of civilisation, taming the wilds or unlocking the secrets of creation was unkown even to the gods. Ath created the Legion to be warriors so that they may survive and guard their smaller Tolatl partners.

Not only were the Legion given thick hides, large muscles and tough bones, they were also given minds that were innately disciplined, hardened against stress and predisposed towards combat. This kind of mind was incredibly effective during the vicious Age of Darkness and the centuries of combat that was required to form the Empire of Catla. However, settling down to create long-term communities without physical conflict is difficult for a battle-hungry Legion.

Legion are ill-suited to sedentary and dull lives, and need physical activity and danger. This hunger for action and conflict has been dubbed the 'inner fire'; a burning slice of their goddess' nature within each of them. This is something that all Legion must learn to tame and is usually channeled into intense physical sports, military service and hunting.

Nations of Fire & Ice

Ironically, a so-called civilised life of farms, regimented armies, walled towns, peace and coin has never sat perfectly well with the Legion. They are a wrestless people who desire order but are drawn to action. Over thousands of years this has split their people in two; the civilised northerners of the Kingdoms of Catla and Ire, and the wild Southern Legion Tribes of the vast White Expanse.

Those who live in the southern tundras have harder and less prosperous lives, but they are undoubataly happier. The cold cools their souls as their lives of action and tight community simultaniously feeds their inner fire. Those of the north look down upon their southern kin as stagnant, disordered, violent and unwise; slaves to their instincts.

Duchy of Rubis (Kingdom of Ire)

The pious House of Rubis are renowned for their techno-magical Radiant Knights and stalwart defence against Southern Tribe raiders. They are beacons of loyalty to the Eternal gods, and especially to the goddess of justice; Jop Jop. Their hilly lands are pocketed by palisaded villages, fishing towns techno-magically drilled mines and shepherds.

- Favour thick clothing with icons to the gods.
- Sturdy hilltop wood and stone houses with slate roofs designed to resist fire.
- Strong adherence to the Eternal gods and use of techno-magic.
- Strong guilds that export ore and import food.

Grand Duchy of Burdragon (Holy Kingdom of Catla)

The ancient, violent and feared House Burdragon have been the sword arm of the royal House of Catla since the dawn of civilisation. They rule over their vast swampy and misty lands with an iron fist. Slave gangs work their fields, Black Knights patrol their roads, monsters prowl their dark woods and the ten sons of the Grand Duke Burdragon fight each other for land as they await their father's death.

- Favour dark clothing with minimal adornment.
- Simple dark-wooden houses with unkept thatched rooves.
- A dark land ruled by fear.

Kingdom of Romanos

The distant frozen Kingdom of Romanos has a complex history as they were ancient defectors from the Southern Tribes into the Empire of Catla. They are skilled fishermen and sailors, and have embraced and adapted many traditions from both of their cultural heritages.

- Favour animal hide clothing with jewellery made of ivory and trophies earned battle.
- Large wooden multi-generational houses that are both adorned with and partially constructed from monster bones.
- Strong attachment to the goddess Ath.

Southern Raiders (Southern Legion Tribe)
The notorious Southern Tribes live harsh lives among the rolling snow drifts, crags and mountains of the vast White Expanse. They are ancient people who can trace their lineage back to the dawn of civilisation, bearing a tumultuous history marked by great ascents and devastating collapses. Now ascendant once more, they raid the northern kingdoms, seizing thralls and plunder to fuel their growing power.

Their actions are driven by a prophecy foretelling a great war that will reshape the world. Unified under the dominion of the Blood Horns tribe and their ruthless devotion to the goddess Ath, the Southern Tribes pose an existential threat to the realms of Ire and Catla. Should their onslaught remain unchecked, the collapse of both kingdoms may become inevitable.

- Favour animal hide clothing with jewellery made of ivory and trophies earned battle.
- Large wooden multi-generational houses.
- Strong attachment to the goddess Ath.

Respect
Though they are a people of many nations and cultures, all Legion are unified in their value of respect. In some, this manifests as a code of honour, a desire to be feared or recognised by their lord. A Legion who defies authority, betrays loyalty, or lacks self-control is swiftly cast to the fringes of society.To be untamable is to be no better than a beast and to show disrespect is to invite bloodshed.

Old & New Ath
- See Ath write-up on pg: 182.

Yellow sun goddess of wisdom, war and the Legion; Ath was once sought after by knights and scholars for her bravery and clarity of thought. Second only to her twin brother Akh in the hearts of pious kings and peasants. She was destined to kill Neph – the wild goddess of nature and scourge of civilisation – and forever guide the Empire of Catla into a brighter future. When the Archdruid destroyed the Empire and the meek goddess Fik slew Neph, it was not the people who grew out of her favour, but her out of theirs. With each passing year, her temples and priests across the civilised nations wane, and her popularity across the sea among the Southern Tribes grows ever stronger. Those with long memories still venerate the goddess, but she is increasingly seen as the bloody goddess of barbarians.

The priests and priestesses of the Eternal gods do not see their deities as immutable. As with civilisation and people, they evolve and grow, as does our understanding of them. Most gods were uncultured and primal before civilisation. Yet Ath stands apart – a goddess who was never wild, but who is now treading a path of barbarity.

- **Truth:** The Empire of Catla assimilated the gods of conquored people. Adapted their myths, rituals and attributes to align with their values and traditions.

Secret Insight
- See Fragged Empire 2 Setting Guide book for a full write up on the expanded sci-fi setting.

The Legion were genetically engineered in haste by the Archons to fight their losing war against the X'ion. They struggled to create a stable society after the war and formed a symbiotic relationship with another species known as the Corp as mercenaries. Many Legion questioned this relationship, worrying that they were once again becoming the sacrificial fighting force for another master species. Those who lived outside mainstream Legion culture were known as Exilia or Nomads.

The Legion arrived on Akharon in two groups, primarily as the guards for the Corporation (especially the Dray Mining Consortium (DMC)) and a smaller faction of Nomads who settled in the arctic polls to live simple lives as hunters. The DMC made heavy use of convict and indentured workers, along with biological robots known as FLESH. Many workers were Tolatl, who conspired with bribed and sympathetic guards to overthrow their Corporate masters. The uprising was far too successful and drove the Corp off Akharon and awakened Mechonids (insane robot warriors from the X'ion war) who destroyed all spacecraft and communication systems.

The Corp abandoned their workforce, including thousands of Legion and other workers who did not contribute to the uprising. All were forced into hiding, with many Legion retreating into Nomad territory were they were forced to destory their technology to survive.

* * *

The Southern Tribes were visited by an off-world Legion task force who were dispatched to study their culture and genetics. They learned that the Legion of Akharon are well-suited to their pre-industrial societies, were in good health and suffered reduced mental strain from their 'inner fire'. Legion in advanced societies struggle to maintain social cohesion in the absence of war.

A secondary objective of the task force was to search for hidden Archon laboratories associated with the Triumvirate or Xio-Verum factions, particularly those linked to Legion and Angel super-soldier programs.

To minimize their time on Akharon and exposure to psionic nanite contamination, the task force adopted the personas of the goddess Ath and her servants. It is not known if they safely departed Akharon and avoided triggering an antibody-like response from the nanites.

Remnant

The Remnant have a complex and difficult history that is filled with many villains, victims and saints. They are also a species of great physical variety, with some as small as a Tolatl while others tower over the Legion. Most are feline in appearance, but others have some semblance of a bear or rodent.

It was they who were the first enchanters and initial followers of the peaceful teachings of the self-described 'one and only' god known as the All-Being. His devout All-Monk followers (along with other outcasts) were hunted down and driven out by the ancient Empire of Catla into the distant Whispering Jungles of the north. It was there in those isolated monster-filled lands that the Remnant Archdruid created his syncretistic religion before laying waste to civilisation. It is the Remnant who rule the beautiful Tarquinius Republic that survived the Drudic War, but also the Remnant Salt Pirates of the Kraken Isles who plague the eastern seas.

While the Remnant do not have the spectacular physical gifts of the other species, they are on average stronger, smarter and more agile than others. Their population in the Kingdoms of Catla and Ire are few, and they have learned to keep to themselves, often travelling in small nomadic groups that offer specialized services. Some are suspicious of them, but most are thankful for their friendly smiles, news of distant lands and their monk's healing gifts.

- **Species Stats:**
  - +1 Persuasion and Apothecary.
  - +2 Attribute/Durability points.
  - May function in non-critical temperature environments (desert heat, arctic cold, etc...) without penalty.
  - Complication: Prejudice from Holy Kingdom of Catla.
  - Suffering 2+ Attribute damage from a single Attack: causes you to Bleed.

- **Common Characteristics:**
  - Amicable, cautious, enigmatic, joyous.
  - Often outsiders of society.

  - Average Life: 115 years.
  - Mammalian features according to their ethnicity.
  - Black, white, brown, orange or cream coloured fur.
  - Diet: Different ethnic groups have preferences for different food (ie: felines prefer soft meat, such as fish).

- **Example First Names:**
  - Anesu (f), Chipo (f), Farai (m), Gamuchirai (f), (m), Nyasha (m), Rutendo (f), Tafadzwa (m), Takudzwa (m), Tariro (f), Tatenda (m), Thandeka (f), Tapiwa (m), Varaidzo (f), Vimbai (f).

- **Family Names:**
  - Dziva, Gomo, Hwekwete, Inyika, Mafuta, Mvura, Mweya, Nzvimbo, Rusvava, Tsose, Zuva.

- **Eternal God Creator:** Neph.

Example Character, Tendai Kutsiva

Tendai's early years were steeped in a biting cynicism and fierce streaks of rebellion. Raised in the fractious household of a struggling merchant family in the gritty sprawl of Razum, she grew bitterly disenchanted with a world where fools held sway. She chafed under the thumb of dim-witted men – born to power through luck rather than merit – and preening ladies whose elegance masked a hollow core.

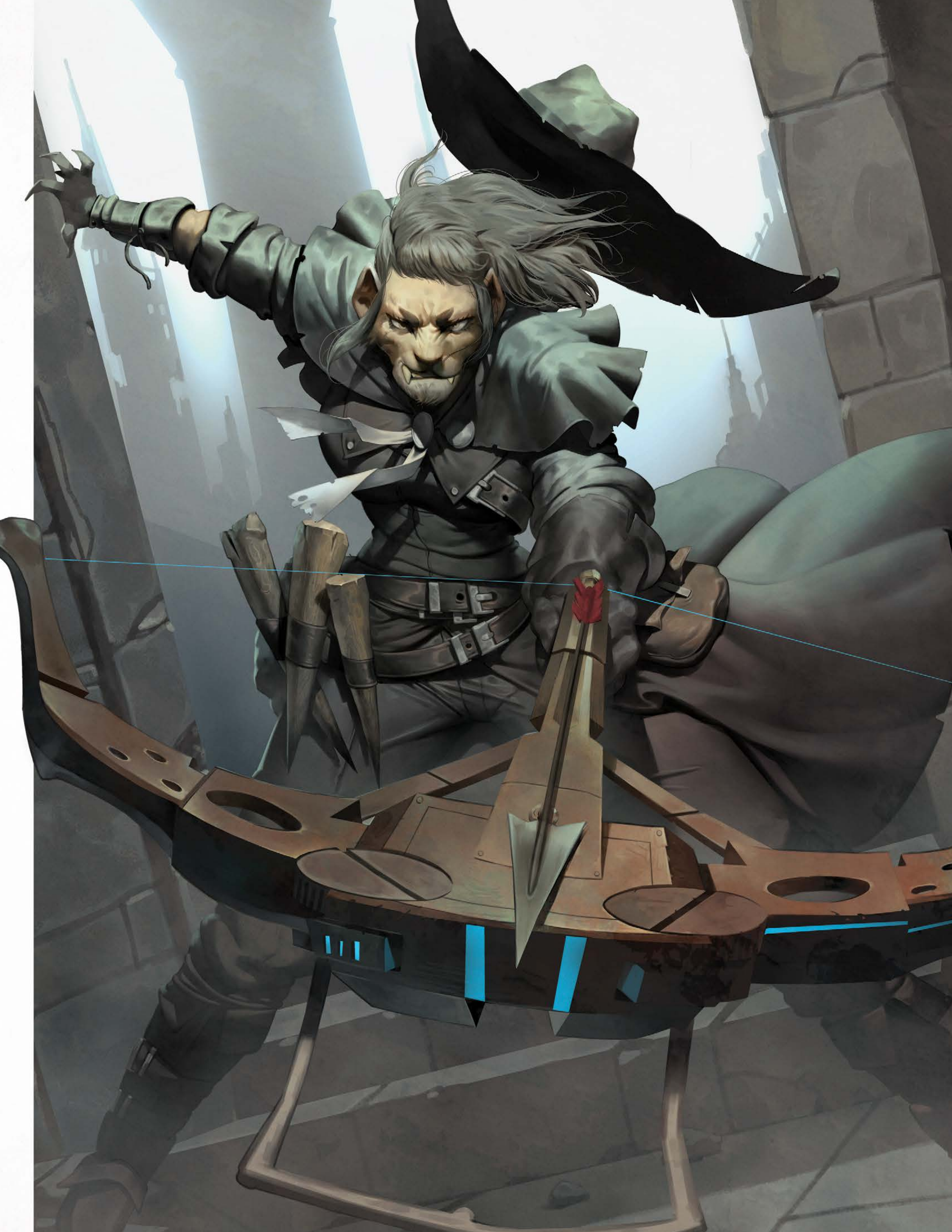
Her interest in the occult began in her teenage years. She was drawn to dark tales and the supernatural as a means to escape from her mundane and often painful existence. Her rebellious nature led her to become a self-taught marksman, scholar and physician. Making her way through life on her own terms and as she hunted down demons, vampires, witches and all manner of monsters who thrive in the dark recesses of society.

Tendai's early training was marked by reckless experimentation, esoteric teachers, a disregard for consequences and lessons learned the hard way through direct encounters with malevolent forces. These years were full of personal failures and moral compromises. While her skills grew, so did her cynicism, often pushing away allies and embracing a morally ambiguous approach to problem-solving.

In recent years Tendai has hunted within the cursed city of Wick, a fogbound warren of spires where vampires reign. Drawn by whispers of the ancient first borne of the Vacubus bloodline, she tracks their lairs – abandoned crypts and corrupted noble households. The city's decay mirrors her weariness, yet she persists, driven to purge its shadows as its curse gnaws at her.

Tendai's hunt has morphed into a personal crusade, a relentless vendetta sparked by a vampire's seduction and transformation of a rare ally she'd come to trust. Once a solitary hunter, she now battles the creatures of the night with fury and a new willingness to ally herself with a team of ragtag hunters – a jittery priest of Akh, a grizzled swordmaster and a keen-eyed smuggler. Tendai bristles at their aid, her cynicism clashing with a creeping need. Each shared victory binds her closer to them, eroding her isolation as she wrestles with a truth she loathes: alone, she might fall to the shadows she's sworn to destroy.

- **Attributes:**
  - **Strength:** ⬢⬢⬡⬡⬡
  - **Mobility:** ⬢⬢⬢⬢⬡
  - **Intelligence:** ⬢⬢⬢⬡⬡
  - **Reflexes:** ⬢⬢⬢⬢⬡
  - **Focus:** ⬢⬢⬡⬡⬡
  - **Grit:** ⬢⬢⬢⬢⬢
- **Trained Skills:**
  - Sophistication, Physical, Resolve, Awareness, Stealth, Apothacry.
  - Finesse, Cunning.
- **Traits:** Arcane-Hunter (Resources), Swift Shadow (Stealth).
- **Equipment:**
  - Wooden Stakes (Dagger – Composite), Techno-Crossbow (Hunting Bow, Composite), Leather Outfit (Flexible), Tome – Monsters, Toolboxes (Resolve and Stealth), Torch.



Overview

- Common Traits:
  - All-Monk (Resources), Tenacious (Focus), Theologian (Sophistication), Regular Workout (Physical), Survivor (Pathfinding), Smarter (Cunning).
- Common Equipment:
  - Dagger, short sword, hatchet, quarterstaff, spear, hunting bow, light outfits, potion (life – rejuvenation), potion (life – restoration, apothecary toolbox.

"I am free, but the echoes of my chains still rattle within me. I may have gained my liberty, yet my spirit is bound to the past. I remember the lash, the endless toil, the cold indifference of masters who saw me as nothing more than a beast. Now, I walk the streets a free Remnant, but the weight of what I was weighs heavy on my soul. Am I truly free if my heart still fears the lash? Will I ever gain release from this haunting past?"

– Tariro Kuzvida,
liberated slave from the Holy Kingdom.

The Remnant were the firstborn of all intelligent species, brought into existence by the goddess Neph before most Eternal deities had come into being. They fared better than many during the primal Age of Darkness as they are a gifted people – often more cunning, swifter and mightier than others. Their forms are as varied as their talents, ranging from small and feline to hulking and bear-like.

The history of the Remnant is woven with the threads of wicked villains and noble saints, immense adversity and remarkable resilience. They are the outcasts of history who appear to be destined to forever push against the tides of civilisation. Among their number is the demigod Archdruid, who brought down the vast Empire of Catla; infamous pirate Salt Monarchs, who break all foreign chains; holy All-Monks, who founded an entire faith for the downtrodden; the abandoners of the spiritual Wild River, who reduced the Ta'Di'Si religion to the Ta'Di; and the Tarqûn warrior-merchants, who created Akharon's first republic. Each of these Remnant are a testament to their people's defiant nature and restless pursuit of growth.

History of Migration, Displacement & Chains

The Remnant were enslaved by the ancient Empire of Catla and scattered to the edges of civilisation and Akharon. There they lived as nomads, pirates or monks in inhospitable lands. They are hardy and adaptable people who can live in almost any environment due to their variable forms, adaptable fur and the sturdy cultures that they create.

Most Remnant within the Kingdom of Ire can trace their lineage back to servitude, either from the old Empire or the modern-day Holy Kingdom of Catla. Though the twin blooded king of Ire traces his half-Remnant heritage back to the enigmatic nomads of the southern Tomb Forest. The Remnant are a minority people within the Kingdom of Ire and a majority within the Tarquinius Republic and Kraken Isles where their ancestors survived the fall of the Empire and the Druidic War.

Eastern Merchants-Warriors (Tarquinius Republic)

The Republic is a resilient nation built from the ashes of the Druidic War. Its survival was forged through determination and by its nouveau nobility, the Tarqûn.

Political power is tied to land ownership through a principle known as the "Will of the Soil," where citizens earn influence by cultivating territory gained through service. Trade is also central to the nation's identity, with the "Horizon's Eye" principle focusing on establishing deep economic ties abroad. Despite hostile neighbors such as the Panos Theocracy who condemns them as heathens and the Kraken Isle Pirates who raid their shores, Tarquinius thrives through its strong guilds and trading partners.

- Favour colourful clothing.
- Stone houses built on mountainsides with colourful rooves.
- Strong tradition of earning your way.
- Strong industry, trade and guilds.
- Blue Echru Boars are commonly used as mounts.

Eastern Salt Folk (Kraken Isle Pirates)

Home to the Salt Folk, the people of the Kraken Isles embody a harsh yet vibrant maritime culture forged by tumultuous seas, violent storms and fearsome sea monsters. These intrepid pirates cherish their freedom from the oppressive Catlan Empire, embracing a life of plunder, revelry, and camaraderie, all under the aegis of their fierce sea goddess, Corp.

- Favour dark and flexible clothing.
- Irregularly shaped stone and dark wood houses, with thatched rooves and adorned with, metal, bones and ocean salvage.
- Many charms and trinkets threaded into their fur.
- Value freedom, wealth and strength.
- Strong attachment to the goddess Corp.

Northern Lost People (Twisted Forest Druids & Monks)

The Archdruid is the most infamous figure of history, as he was the destroyer of the Empire of Catla some two centuries past and possibly holds the power of a god. Many who still venerate the dead goddess Neph are Remnant, and roam the northern Twisted Forest with warbands of mighty druids, Neph Spawn monsters and skilled hunters

Though the wild northern lands hold many dangers, they are also home to numerous nomads who are just trying to live their lives. They are varied in their cultural makeups, though many of those who follow the All-Faith are Remnant, peaceful and unthreatened by the Twisted Forest.

- Wild nomads favour furs, bone, wood and rocks. Materials from Neph Spawn and wylding can be as strong as steel.
- All-Faith favour loose-fitted robes of muted natural tones.
- Most nomads use simple tents of wood and hide.

Southern Nomads (Tomb Forest)

The nomads of the mysterious Tomb Forest to the south of the Kingdom of Ire are the oldest continuous Remnant-culture on Akharon. These tribes are bound by a deep connection to the land and navigate their mysterious, mist-shrouded realm atop shaggy six-legged Umbral Yaks.

- Favour loose-fitted robes of light tones.
- Round tent homes made of wood and canvas.
- Cautious of outside nations.
- Accustomed to avoiding fey.
- Entire tribes may be carried on the backs of Umbral Yaks.

Heavy Hands of Faith

The Remnant have a deep relationship with religion as they feature prominently within all three major faiths. Most Remnant have strong opinions on religion, as all religions have strong opinions on them.

Eternal Priesthood

The Eternal priests believe the Remnant carry within them a shard of Neph - the dead goddess of nature - that forever sets them against civilisation. The traditionist clergy of the Holy Kingdom of Catla see the Remnant as hairy beasts, a first faltering step of creation by an evil goddess. This sentiment is widely used as justification for their enslavement.

House Catla has a divine narrative that places each species in their place within civilisation. Most promonently the Tolatl as rulers, Legion as defenders and Remnant as villans. Envy makes the Remnant an easy scapegoat as they are a gifted people, successful, resistant to cultural assimilation and have historically served a foreign anti-materialist god.

In contrast, the clergy of Ire believe the Remnant have always been touched by the stars, fated by Mon and the goddess Fik to improve civilisation by pushing it to grow. When Fik killed Neph she usurped the dead goddess's influence over the Remnant, making them her people. They are the chosen instruments of fate, whether they want to be or not.

Ta'Di

The seers and soothsayers of the Ta'Di see the Remnant as a discordant people who lost part of themselves and their place in the world when they abandoned their obligations to maintain the fey of the Wild River for a pagan god - the All-Being. Many Remnant are drawn to the Ta'Di, seeking to heal their souls by recommitting themselves to nature and the spirit world.

All-Faith

The All-Faith originated with the Remnant, though it is now practised by all species. The All-Monks regard the Remnant as the first bearers of the All-Being's message of truth and love, chosen because they were the least of all people and would demonstrate the All-Being's greatness.

Secret Insight

- See Fragged Empire 2 Setting Guide book for a full write up on the expanded sci-fi setting.

The Remnant were one of the early succesfull genetically engineered species to be created by the Archons. The ruled over a many star systems but fell out of favour with their masters due to the their lack of exotic natural abilities. They betrayed the Archons during the X'ion War and sided with the Nephilim. This was all for naught as they themselves were in turn betrayed by the Nephilim.

In desperation they turned to an ancient Human weapon known as the Deatomiser. But the weapon was beyond their understanding and killed not only the Nephilim attackers but also the themselves, leaving behind seas of tortured psychic ghosts that would come to be known as Echoes (known on Akharon as wraiths). With a single flash of vast power the Remnant had been reduced to yet another extinction footnote in a vast and complex war.

This would have been their end if not for the arrival some fifty years later by the god-like entity that is known as the All-Being, who raised millions of Remnant from the dead. In time the Remnant would abandon their home star system and join with other surviving species in Haven and on the planet Akharon as colonists.

* * *

The Remnant who settled on Akharon were primarily a faction known as the Psion Mind who rejected the divinity of the All-Being as a psionic manifestation (known as an All-Entitity) born of millions of dead Nephilim and Remnant. They were scientists who brought large quantities of psionic nanites with them for their experimentation. During the technological collapse of the planet and the rise of the Mechonids they were forced to destroy their technology and used their nanites to infect the Mechonids and return them to their hibernation.

In two ironic twists, in the aftermath of these events most Psion Mind Remnant gained faith in the All-Being as the one true god. And their psioninc nanites were the seeds that would eventually to take the form of powerful All-Entities with the personalities of the Eternal gods. Taking on the beliefs of the people, and making them real.

Their rejection of their Psion Mind beliefs became mythologised as their rejection of the so-called 'Wild River' path that transformed the Ta'Di'Si into the Ta'Di.

Tolatl

Despite their small stature, no species has had such a profound impact on the civilised nations of Akharon as the Tolatl, as they have long dominated many of its seats of knowledge and authority.

The first to form a large multi-species nation, they rose to prominence with the creation of the massive Empire of Catla before its fall to the Archdruid. They now rule the Holy Kingdom of Catla, and across the continent they are often Eternal priests, bureaucrats, teachers, architects, artists, techno-mages and the leaders of organised crime. Without the Tolatl there would be no techno-magic, great civil institutions, an organised Eternal religion, a shared common language or any influential multi-species nations. But it was also they who historically led the charge to kill druids, drive out peaceful All-Faith monks, plunder southern Legion tribes and enslave the Creet and Dracim.

- Species Stats:
  - +1 Wealth and Stealth.
  - You're Trained in an additional Skill.
  - Your tail counts as an extra hand (may not carry Large items).
  - Perk: You're Tiny.
  - Your Camp gains +1 Authority.
  - +2 Defence if you're an NPC.
  - −2 max Strength.
  - −2 Equipment Slots.

- Common Characteristics:
  - Analytical, energetic, flighty, fun, persistent, talkative.
  - Often social leaders (ie: noble, religious, business owners, etc..) and eager to further the spread of society.

  - Average Life: 72 years.
  - Large ears.
  - Long prehensile tail.
  - Blue, green, purple, yellow or brown skin with spots.
  - Sometimes with thin fur.
  - Diet: Preference for sweets.

- Example First Names:
  - Acalan (m), Acue (f), Cahuan (m), Citla (f), Eloxia (f), Eloxoch (m), Itzcoy (m), Itzli (f), Malin (f), Mixtli (m), Nenetl (f), Ocotli (m), Tecpan (m), Tepin (f), Xipil (m).
- Middle Names:
  - This is a descriptive or honorific name that indicates a person's lineage, family position or a notable event; such as "First Daughter", "Hard Head" or "Blue Eyes".
- Family Names:
  - Inspired by a geographic feature that indicates a family's place of origin or association. Such as Prest (for Pol's Rest). City names are reserved for nobles and building names for families with institutional renown.

- Eternal God Creator: Akh.

Example Character, Izel Goldvale

Izel was born to the illustrious Goldvale lineage, vassals under the great house of Lagos and famed for their gilded halls and command over trade routes threading throughout the Kingdom of Ire. Izel's early life was one of privilege – tutors versed in history and the gods, banquets of roasted meat and a stable of golden-furred stags. Yet, at a young age he noticed the strain beneath the splendour: his father's reckless spending on doomed ventures and his mother's mounting gambling debts. The young Izel, keen-eyed and intuitive, foresaw the family's impending downfall and quietly began to plot his escape.

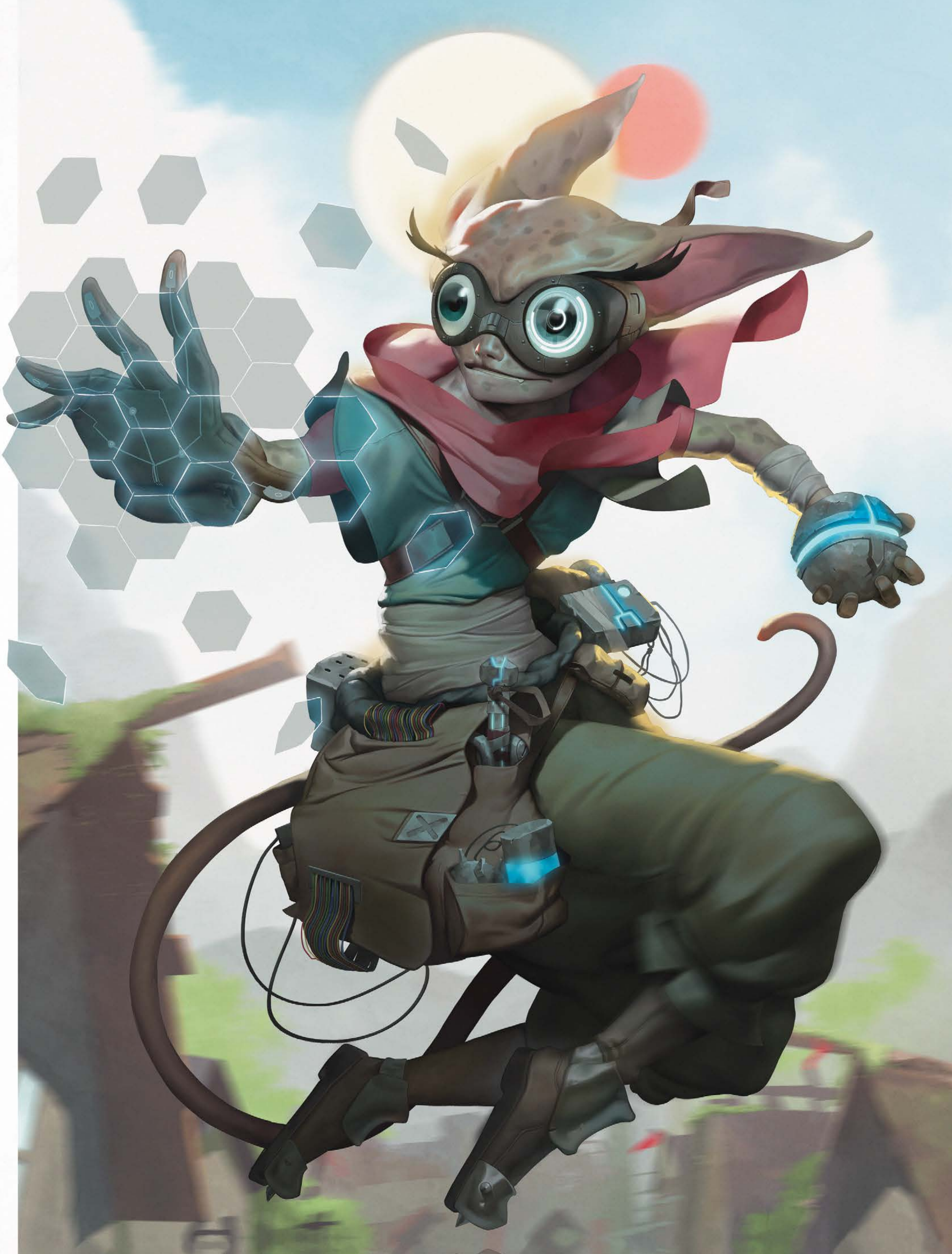
Drawn to the arcane, Izel pilfered a dusty techno-magical grimoire from his uncle's locked study as the call of adventure outweighed his birthright. He started to slip away at night, honing his skills as he moonlit as a mercenary. It was on his first such caper that he met his best friend, an imposing Creet named Jotar. A soft-hearted titan of crystalline muscle who kept him alive long enough to develop his survival instincts.

He severed ties with the Goldvale name, sensing its collapse as creditors stormed the manor. When word reached him, his family's wealth had vanished – lands seized and titles stripped by their Lagos overlords – he felt only liberation. Unshackled, he embraced the wild unknown, grimoire in hand.

Izel's noble upbringing lent him poise and a cultivated mind, gifts that proved invaluable in dealings with his eclectic clientele. From tight-pursed merchants to desperate frontier settlers, many found themselves swayed, securing contracts others deemed impossible. Despite their triumphs, Izel knew that he and Jotar were playing it too safe in their choice of work. He yearned to explore distant realms, uncover techno-magical wonders and vanquish formidable beasts.

To achieve this, Izel knew they would have to start taking on contracts from noble lords and ladies. And to gain those contracts, his poise and intellect alone wouldn't suffice; they would need to bolster their team's ranks.

- Attributes:
  - Strength: ⬢⬢⬡⬡⬡
  - Mobility: ⬢⬢⬢⬢⬡
  - Intelligence: ⬢⬢⬢⬢⬡
  - Reflexes: ⬢⬢⬢⬡⬡
  - Focus: ⬢⬢⬡⬡⬡
  - Grit: ⬢⬢⬢⬡⬡
- Trained Skills:
  - Wealth, Cunning, Sophistication, Insight, Awareness, Stealth, Metallurgy.
  - Finesse, Cunning.
- Traits: Techno-Mage (Resources), Studious (Intelligence).
- Equipment:
  - Potent Power (Orb), Cloth Outfit (Practical), Alchemist Belt, Toolboxes (Wealth, Awareness and Metallurgy), Torch.



Overview

- See Eternal Priesthood write-up on pg: 176.

- Common Traits:
  - Techno-Mage (Resources), Agent of Crown/Faith/Nobility (Influence), Evade (Reflexes), Ambitious (Focus), Old Money (Wealth), Urbane (Culture), Scholar (Sophistication).
- Common Equipment:
  - Small weapons, dueling blade, throwing knives, pistol, rifle, bomb, scale, splint, focus utilities, potion utilities, alchemist belt, wealth/stealth toolboxes.

"Cities are the natural habitat of the Tolatl. A spider's nest of laws, words, buildings, walls, tools and commerce – all poison and web. Civilisation is a realm where knowledge and cooperation reign supreme. An upside-down reality where the small and weak can dominate the strong and deadly. The Tolatl are spreading their natural ecosystem, as trees expand the habitats of animals. Though, unlike the natural world, there is no satiation or harmony – given time they will consume all of Akharon and ask for more."

– Unknown druid.

The Tolatl were created in secret by Akh – yellow sun god of civilisation, air and family – alongside the mighty Legion during the primal Age of Darkness. While their larger simian allies were clearly designed to flourish in their world of monsters and muscle, the Tolatl were seemingly destined to be prey. Small and vulnerable, they faced a world where their survival demanded ingenuity and resourcefulness.

The Tolatl created tools, gathered people into large settlements, and tamed both the land and wild beasts. Their relentless reshaping of Akharon drew the ire of Neph – goddess of nature – who viewed their actions as a corruption of the natural world. She sought to kill them and would have succeeded if it were not for the intervention of Pol – god of magic and metal – who sacrificed his life to stop her. Though Neph survived, she paid dearly, losing both her left arm and the god-slaying spear, Ire.

Outraged at the death of their brother, the gods rallied together to protect the Tolatl and Legion. Claiming that they and their creators – Akh and Ath – were following in the footsteps of their father, who had created until his final breath.

Not Just Little Lords & Ladies

The priests of the Eternal gods claim that it was the Tolatl who created the first cities, and from those early embers the vast Empire of Catla was born. This was the largest nation Akharon has ever seen, spanning the entire continents of Catlan and what is now known as the Whispering. For almost four centuries the royal House of Catla ruled, until their Empire was destroyed by the Archdruid when his monstrous armies brought civilisation to the brink of annihilation. In the centuries that followed, the remnants of this culture flickered to life, fractured and repeatedly reformed, eventually giving rise to several distinct nations.

Amid these successor nations, the Tolatl continue to prosper as nobles, scholars, techno-mages, craftsmen, merchants and moneylenders – thriving in any vocation where their diminutive stature does not hinder them. Historically linked with the aristocracy and Eternal priesthood, the Tolatl are often perceived as natural rulers. While many embrace this cultural legacy, others strive to distinguish themselves in different arenas, seeking to demonstrate their worth beyond the traditional roles assigned to them.

Badulf County (Kingdom of Ire)

Bordering both Twisted Forest and Blood Stone Desert, the people under House Badulf are no strangers to taking up the sword, including their sizable Tolatl population. Their realm flourishes under the wise and resolute rule of Earl Tlaloc Badulf. Prosperity flows steadily into their lands, driven by lucrative trade with the distant Tarquinius Republic.

- Favour practical clothing with muted colours.
- Compact two-story stone houses.
- Strong tradition of martial training.
- Many guilds, merchants and mercenaries.

Duchy of Lagos (Kingdom of Ire)

Renowned for their political schemes and lust for power, House Lagos is the enemy of any who holds authority over them. For a century following the Drudic War, they ruled the Kingdom of Catla from the shadows, and they are undoubtedly planning their return to power as soon as the king of Ire dies. The Tolatl of their realm dominate their society and like to push the boundaries of acceptability; notably with their many small doors that exclude the larger species and their open worship of the evil god Dos as a legitimate member of the Eternal pantheon.

- Favour expensive and dark clothing.
- Multistory white houses with small doors.
- Strong tradition of social power plays and might makes right.
- Many underworld organisations.

House Catla (Holy Kingdom of Catla)

Having risen to and fallen from the pinnacles of power many times throughout history, the House of Catla have become the masters of growing and ensuring their place over multiple generations. Their Holy Kingdom is a land of multiple realms, with their Central province defined by its large cities, techno-magical trains, large bureaucratic institutions and grand temples to the Eternal gods. House Catla's singular driving goal is to see the return of the old Empire of Catla.

- Favour expensive clothes with geometric patterns.
- Large houses with curved rooves, white walls yellow slate rooves and complex gardens.
- Many factories and bureaucratic institutions that are fueled by slaves and resources from neighbouring provinces and colonies.

Marquessate of Elpis (Holy Kingdom of Catla)

Known as the "House of Golden Loyalty," this rising noble family stands on the brink of becoming a new great House thanks to the wealth generated by their many thriving colonies. The Tolatl of their domain are renowned for their skill as sailors and merchants, adept at striking profitable deals and navigating both the treacherous seas and the ever-shifting winds of opportunity.

- Favour brightly coloured clothing made of light materials.
- Multipurpose houses that double as places of work.
- Strong tradition of sailing and making use of money.
- Maintain a large fleet and many warehouses.
- Their colonies are worked by many slaves.

Blessed Tails

Tolatl take immense pride in their tails, particularly if theirs boasts a rare or exotic appearance. Beyond aiding in balance, their tails function as versatile limbs, capable of gripping objects like a hand. Those blessed by Akh possess an even greater gift, divine tails that can transform into wondrous tools. Daily grooming is a sacred ritual for all Tolatl, as a well-kept tail is a mark of dignity, while an unclean tail invites disapproval from other Tolatl.

- **Truth:** Tolatl were genetically engineered by Archons to have morphic tails that can interface with their lab computers or transform into tools

Divine Tension

Tolatl were created by Akh to defy the goddess Neph, to create civilisation and to resist her wylding. They are unable to use wylding magic and will often self-destruct before their bodies succumb to mutation. They are also incapable of interbreeding with other species and most Neph Spawn dislike the taste of their flesh. These innate defences have safeguarded the purity of Tolatl noble bloodlines, preserved their strength through wylding plagues and deterred numerous Neph Spawn. 'Better Dead than Neph' is an ancient Tolatl saying.

- Many wylding Traits are unavailable to Tolatl.
- Some wylding Arcane powers have altered effects or do not work on Tolatl.

Most Tolatl rejoiced at the death of Neph. Though they are eager to pay due respect to the new goddesses of nature – Nijin and Jinin. They see them as a chance to develop a harmonious relationship between civilisation and wilds, and avoid a second apocalyptic Druidic War.

- **Truth:** Tolatl were genetically engineered by Archons to data within their bodies and operate their labs. They feared organic tampering and were designed to self-destruct if their genes were altered with.

Secret Insight

- See Fragged Empire 2 Setting Guide book for a full write up on the expanded sci-fi setting.

The Tolatl were genetically engineered by the Archons to work as laboratory assistants with prehensile morphogenetic tails and built-in kill switches that prevented tampering with their genes. Following the X'ion War many were captured by a Nephilim Brood that was exclusively made up of giant Oni Nephilim and slaves. Their kill-switches made them inedible to the Oni (as they made them sick) and they were ideal technical slaves. During the defeat of the Oni World Ship in the Haven system, many Tolatl were able to escape. Often banding together as pirates and raiders. The Tolatl had known Oni brutality for their entire lives and were turned into tiny reflections of their former masters. They had no word for kindness and lived for the acquisition of power.

Thousands of Tolatl were imprisoned by other Haven species for their crimes, especially by the Corp and put to work in penal work gangs for the Dray Mining Consortium (DMC) on Akharon. The Tolatl viewed this as yet another form of enslavement and rose up to overthrow the DMC along with many bribed and sympathetic Legion guards.

The uprising was far more impactful than any anticipated, driving the DMC off-world and awaking countless slumbering Mechonids robots from the X'ion War. The DMC abandoned their workers as the Mechonids swiftly destroyed all technology that they encountered. Many Tolatl and Legion worked together during this time of technological collapse and were among the first to emerge from hiding after the Mechonids returned to their hibernation.

◆

The maimed god Ugra'thok on the distant continent of Mammon is a gigantic Oni.

Twi-Far

- See Ta'Di religion write-up from pg: 194.

Radiant and otherworldly, the magical Twi-Far inhabit bodies formed from two independent sentient species: the physical form and mind that they are born with, and an ethereal spirit that they merge with at a young age.

There are two great Twi-Far nations; the brutal Drasong Clan slavers of the Blood Stone Desert who dispise all gods, and the contemplative people of the distant Fari and Eyna islands who worship the great spirit phoenix Peridil. Both follow the Ta'Di religion and see themselves as wardens to the many majestic spirits that reflect the health of the natural world.

Those who have found themselves in the Kingdom of Ire commonly live in rural towns and villages. Though more than a few have learned to harness spirits of fire in the industrial forges, and there are many travelling Ta'Di seers that make their way through the world tending to sick and enraged spirits.

- **Species Stats:**
  - +1 Metallurgy and Pathfinder.
  - +1 current and max Resources.
  - You share a bond with a spirit inside you:
    - **Spirit Strike:** One of your Weapons gains the Innate Keyword and loses the Large Keyword.
    - May use Skills to attempt one Essence Arcane Roll (see Rule book, pg: 38) per session that matches your Spirit Strike's Magic type (ie: Metallurgy Skill for Fire).
      - Does not allow the selection of Traits and other options with the Essence Requirement.
  - May function in non-critical desert and hot environments without penalty.

- **Common Characteristics:**
  - Adventurous, creative, emotional, mystical, passionate.
  - Often emotive, and eager to experience art and new things.

  - Average Life: 70 years.
  - Brightly coloured skin (blue, orange, red, etc...) with black spots and can glow.
  - Diet: Preference for new recipes, and need to absorb energy for their inner spirit (ie: fire, lightning, etc...).

- **Example First Names:**
  - Araunya (f), Casamir (m), Colia (m), Hanzi (m), Jeta (f), Lala (f), Mirela (f), Orchilo (m), Papin (f), Vanya (f), Zache (m).
- **Family Names:**
  - **Blood Stone Desert:** Apotheon, Deicide, Eclipsis, Eradicus, Godbane, Godend, Godslayer, Theomortis, Theurgicide.
  - **Fari and Eyna:** Astral, Celestialspring, Enchantment, Enigma, Essence, Forevertrail, Stargazer.

- **Eternal God Creators:** Pol (+Fik and Jop Jop).

Example Character, Vanya Starborne

Born on the distant island of Fari, a wild land steeped in myth and home to a nation of Twi-Far. Vanya's birth was perilous – frail and weak of breath, she tettered on the edge of death. The great phoenix Peridil heard the infant's faint cries and sent a tiny spirit to her aid. The ethereal being merged with Vanya, breathing life into her fragile form and imbuing her with a spark of its otherworldly power.

All Twi-Far unite with a spirit, though never so early in life. These spirits give more than just arcane power, they also enhance their host's emotions and sense of curiosity. Vanya became a wild child, beyond the control of her parents and forever running away into the many woods and mountains that enclosed her home village.

Her untrained gifts unleashed chaos – bursts of blue fire erupted from her hands, reducing trees to ash and scorching the earth. Trails of smoke and splintered trunks betrayed her every step, making her easy to find when she ran away. The other village children shunned her and Vanya grew to resent the spirit within her, cursing it as the source of her disquieted mind.

An old local seer of the Ta'Di religion took her under his wing, guiding her toward harmony with her spirit. He taught her to practice art, to learn to read and travel into wild regions with the intent to discover new plants and mingle with nature spirits. Her spirit craved connection and yearned for discovery – a truth Vanya slowly came to embrace.

As she aged, an insatiable wanderlust took root, propelling her beyond Fari's shores. She sailed the seas as a mariner, battling the notorious Kraken Isle Pirates, laboured as a dockworker in the bustling Tarquinius Republic, and later wielded her skills as a mercenary in the turbulent Kingdom of Ire.

Vanya has made peace with the storm that rages within her. She roams the lands of Ire as hired muscle, her blue flames clearing bandit-infested roads and cutting down vile Neph Spawn monsters. Her spirit revelling in the thrill of combat, the raw intensity of survival and the wonders of new lands. Her reputation grows as both a powerful merc and a force that none can tame.

- **Attributes:**
  - Strength: ⬢⬢⬡⬡⬡
  - Mobility: ⬢⬢⬢⬡⬡
  - Intelligence: ⬢⬢⬡⬡⬡
  - Reflexes: ⬢⬢⬢⬢⬡
  - Focus: ⬢⬢⬢⬢⬡
  - Grit: ⬢⬢⬢⬡⬡
- **Trained Skills:**
  - Culture, Physical, Resolve, Metallurgy, Forestry, Pathfinding.
  - Brawn, Cunning.
- **Traits:** Spirit Friend (Resources), Sailor (Pathfinding).
- **Equipment:**
  - Explosive Power (Magic – Fire (Burn)), Spirit Shield (Scale Outfit, Ability – Essence), Magic – Boots, Toolboxes (Metallurgy and Pathfinding), Torch.

Overview

- See Death of a Wielder & Departure write-up on pg: 66.
- See Peridil write-up on pg: 202.

- Common Traits:
  - Spirit Friend (Resources), Performer (Persuasion), Spirit Guide (Insight), Zealous (Resolve), Weaponsmith (Metallurgy), Carnage (Monsters), Otherworldly (Forestry).
- Common Equipment:
  - Magic weapons for their Spirit Strike, explosive power, light outfits, grimoire utilities, metallurgy/pathfinder toolboxes.

"Twi-Far are woven from the threads of three gods. From Fik, they are bound to the stars, their fates intertwined with the cosmic flow. Jop Jop instilled in them a wild passion, connecting them to spirits that ignite their souls with fervour. Gifted by the now-dead Pol, they masterfully blend metal and magic, crafting wonders that resonate with the divine.

These complex and beautiful people walk a path between mortal and spirit worlds, driven by unquenchable desires and a destiny that they can not escape. Like a fire in a fireplace, they may warm and illuminate, bringing life and inspiration; yet, when they suffer, they may burn like a wildfire, consuming everything in their path."

– Tapiwa Gomo,
Mosaic of Fate, Fire and Wonder.

During the Age of Creation, the great Mon turned to his beloved daughters, Fik; the silent goddess who presided over the cosmos, dreams and fate, and Jop Jop; the wild goddess of justice and ethereal spirits. He implored them to grant a handful of stars and spirits to their brother Pol; the knowledgeable god of magic and metal. With the shimmering stars cradled in his left hand and burning spirits held in his right, Pol wove them together with ancient stones of Akharon, creating a bundle of colourful Twi-Far babies and a vast explosion that would scorch a land that would come to be known as the Blood Stone Desert.

The Twi-Far were thrown into disarray when the goddess Neph killed their beloved Pol at the end of the Age of Darkness. Their anger burned against all gods and their mighty hero, Faren Drasong, struck at them as they walked the earth. Faren sought to kill Akh with the stolen club of Jop Jop, but was deceived by Neph and only succeeded in crippling the god Ugra'thok and killing an Arcane Wielder of Pol (one of five stewards who had taken up Pol's divine duties). Unsettled by this attack and other events, the gods returned to the heavens to guide Akharon with a softer touch. Though not before they vengefully struck at the Twi-Far for their impiety.

The Twi-Far were broken, and many followed the call of the phoenix Peridil across the ocean to claim the islands of Fari and Eyna as their new home. Those who remained in the desert stubbornly clung to their rebellious hatred of the gods. Left vulnerable, the evil god Dos transformed many Twi-Far into Jinn, powerful spirits who would enslave their former kin.

Ethereal Spirit Bond

Twi-Far were created by Pol to permanently bond with an ethereal spirit, effectively changing two individuals into one, and granting the Twi-Far some of their spirit's power. The great phoenix, Peridil, sends an untamed spirit to all young Twi-Far. Those outside the Blood Stone Desert tend to accept these spirits, but they may occasionally seek out a pairing of their own choosing. Those from the desert consider it a right of passage to kill the spirit that was sent to them and seek out a merging with a powerful spirit of the dunes.

Ethereal spirits commonly appear as glowing beings in the form of an animal, insect or strange creature, and embody the essence of the natural world. These spirits typically live within remote regions far from cities and congregate around points of natural beauty; such as a great tree, waterfall, peaceful river or tangled crop of trees. These mystical entities play a significant role upon Akharon, serving as both guardians of nature and mirrors of its well-being.

Most take on features from their habitats; in their appearance, magical powers and temperaments. Particularly rare and esoteric spirits may assume the traits of broader cosmic or philosophical concepts; such as the movement of time, darkness of the night or rage at the poisoning of their forest.

- Ethereal spirits may not communicate through words.

Communicating with an ethereal spirit is challenging, as they lack language and can only convey ideas through feelings, dreams and subtle physical nudges with their host. However, those more attuned to their spirit may unlock unique powers. As a Twi-Far and their spirit share more experiences, they will grow closer and begin to anticipate each other's desires, sometimes entering a trance-like state during profound moments, which can lead to a spirit-induced vision.

Scattered over Akharon

Small clans of Twi-Far can be found all across Akharon, though most reside within the Blood Stone Desert, or on the islands of Fari and Eyna. They're resourceful people who are at home just as much in the green, brown and blue wilds as they are in a blacksmith's forge.

Desert Slavers (Drasong Clan)

The notorious Drasong Clan dominates the harsh Blood Stone Desert to the east of the Kingdom of Ire. Rising from oppression under the Jinn, they have become formidable warriors who value strength and conquest. In addition to their brutality, they show significant economic skill, particularly in slavery and the working of songsteel.

- Favour light clothing with metal.
- Angular tent homes made of bone and canvas.
- Strong tradition of martial skill, art, metalwork and spirituality.
- Make extensive use of slaves.

Eastern Mystics (Fari & Eyna)

After their split from the Twi-Far of the Blood Stone Desert, many followed the call of the phoenix Peridil to the volcanic islands of Fari and Eyna. While the people of Fari are known for their artists, explorers and merchants, those of Eyna are renowned for their warriors and mastery of metalwork. Despite their differing cultures, the two nations live in harmony under the leadership of the Ember Sages, united in reverence for Peridil and their dedication to the Ta'Di religion.

- Favour colourful clothing with elaborate jewellery.
- Small houses with colourful walls and rooves.
- Strong tradition of art, metalwork and spirituality.

Sooth County (Kingdom of Ire)

Gifted a land to call their own following the civil war that created the Kingdom of Ire, the Twi-Far under House Sooth live in two worlds; one of industry, metal, smoke and fire, and the other of nature, spirits, harmony, seers and soothsayers.

- Favour brightly coloured clothing with metal jewellery.
- Multistory houses with colourful walls and rooves.
- Strong tradition of art, metalwork and spirituality.
- Legally required to produce a range of metal components for the kingdom.

Adventure, Aesthetics & Energy

Twi-Far are beautiful, energetic and insightful people who are renowned for their love of aesthetics. They are easy to like on a personal level, though their passionate and adventurous nature can get them into trouble.

All Twi-Far share a deep love for art, discovery, and novelty, a trait universal across their cultures, as the spirits within them evoke positive emotions when they engage in these pursuits. Even the brutal slavers of the Drasong Clan, known for their wild and dangerous spirits, devote immense energy to creating intricate jewellery, performing elaborate dances, producing wondrous artworks and exploring uncharted territories.

Ta'Di Religion

- See Ta'Di write-up on pg: 194.

Founded on the islands of Fari and Eyna by Twi-Far, Kaltorans and Remnant, the animistic Ta'Di religion emphasizes harmony with nature and its many spirits. From the Twi-Far, the **Mystic River (Ta)**; reverence for the ethereal spirits that share Akharon. From the Kaltorans came the **Old River (Di)**; respect for the ancestors, wraiths and tested knowledge. Before they abandoned their responsibilities, the **Wild River (Si)** was the domain of the Remnant; maintaining communication with the mysterious Fey. Kaltorans later developed Reformed Ta'Di when they became a part of the ancient Empire of Catla, a syncronistic merging of Ta'Di and Eternal beliefs – acknowledging the Eternal gods as more than just Great Spirits.

Secret Insight

- See Fragged Empire 2 Setting Guide book for a full write up on the expanded sci-fi setting.

The Twilinger were genetically engineered by the Archons, and were used by them to harvest resources. When the X'ion and the Nephilim attacked their system during the instigation of the Great War the Archons worked the Twilinger population to death to power their Human-era superweapons, and conscripted them into a poorly organised militia. The Twilinger died in the billions to both Archons and Nephilim. This shattered what remained of the Twilinger and they abandoned the Archons and their war, leaving for the dark depths of uncharted space.

Out in the void of space the Twilinger lived as nomads and came upon stars and worlds that even ancient Humanity had not visited. Among the many wonders they witnessed were swarms of alien-like energy beings that they named Faren (known as ethereal spirits on Akharon). The two species merged and formed a symbiotic relationship. Thereafter known as the Twi-Far and they wandered the edges of the galaxy to explore its secrets together as one.

* * *

Small factions of Twi-Far, known as Symphonies, settled on Akharon as colonists. The Drasong Clan emerged from the Dragon Symphony after forming an alliance with powerful Efreeti Symphonies to combat the rising threats on the planet. However, many Twi-Far opposed this union and distanced themselves from their militant kin, leaving them behind in the Blood Stone Desert. Over time, the Phoenix Symphony became the Fari, while the Salamander Symphony evolved into the Eyna.

* * *

Many wild Faren were drawn to Akharon by an unknown force, but their numbers far exceeded those that could merge with the Twi-Far. To adapt, they learned to shape themselves into more recognizable forms, such as glowing animals and other familiar creatures, allowing them to establish a stronger connection with other species.

However, communicating with the Faren remains notoriously difficult, though they tend to resonate more easily with agrarian minds. The Ta'Di religion was partially developed as a means to enhance communication with these enigmatic beings.

Twin Blooded

The children of parents from different species have long walked with feet along two paths. While they may be a symbol of unlikely love, act as a bridge between cultures and draw physical qualities from two lineages, they have never been permitted to be their own stream in the history books as they are unable to have children without the help of dangerous wylding magic. This single feature more than any other has come to relegate them to the edges of society.

Childlessness can have many cultural implications: from labour shortages in a family business, potential loss of lineage and inheritance, social isolation and a lack of support in old age. Peasants look upon Twin Blooded with compassion if their parents are known to the community, while still privately discouraging such cross-species unions in their own children. The aristocracy are often far harsher as Twin Blooded are rarely allowed to carry the family name and are treated as bastard offspring. The demigod king of Ire being a Legion-Remnant Twin Blood is a sensitive topic among nobles, especially as he has produced no children.

Many Twin Blooded are drawn to work as priests, travelling merchants or sellswords, while some fail to find their place and are lured into lives of banditry and thievery.

- Species Stats:
  - +1 Insight and Culture.
  - Select Two:
    - **Creet:** Resistance 1 (Stacks).
    - **Dracim/Neph Spawn:** +1 End Dmg, all Weapons.
    - **Kaltoran:** Reduce all Untrained Skill Roll penalties by 1 (normally -2, Stacks) (+1 Defence if you're an NPC).
    - **Legion:** +6 Endurance.
    - **Remnant:** +1 Attribute/Durability Point, -1 Combat Order.
    - **Twi-Far:** +1 Grit Re-Roll point.
  - May have up to two suitable Traits or other options with a Species Requirement.
  - -2 max Grit.
  - Complication: You may not procreate (unless you're part Neph Spawn), and prejudice from high born.
  - Your Camp suffers -1 Authority (Does not Stack).

- Common Characteristics:
  - Adaptable, hardworking, reserved, sceptical, skilled.
  - Rarely hold positions of social power, and are often open to fringe religions, cultures and ideas.

  - Half Creet tend to have crystalized sections of their body.
  - Half Dracim tend to have horns and scaled skin.
  - Half Kaltorans tend to have four pointed ears and dreadlocks.
  - Half Legion tend to be large with thick skin.
  - Half Remnant tend to have mammalian features and fur.
  - Half Twi-Far tend to have brightly-coloured skin.

Example Character, Gwenyr Oldscale

Born into the grimy slums of Smok, Gwenyr escaped her dysfunctional family and fell in with a ragged street gang of pickpockets and petty thugs. Disaster struck when rumours spread that the gang had stolen a divine artefact, drawing the full wrath of the city watch. All but Gwenyr scattered like rats, fleeing Smok in every direction. She alone was seized and cast into a dungeon to rot until she confessed secrets she didn't possess.

She languished in darkness for three long years, abandoned by those she once called friends. The only kindness she knew came from All-Monks who tended to the prisoners, offering both food and compassion. Their leader was Kyarin, a kindly old Remnant who had taken up the All-Faith after their god had saved him from slavery in the Blood Stone Desert. Under his guidance, Gwenyr endured and her spirit - long hardened - began to stir.

Though the artefact was never recovered, a shift in political power eventually allowed Kyarin to secure Gwenyr's release. She lived and studied under the All-Monks and embraced their devotion to the All-Being as the one true god. They led simple lives, giving what little they had to the sick, the orphaned, and the forsaken - people Gwenyr had once counted herself among.

The monks possessed the ability to channel the golden power of the All-Being, allowing them to heal, prophecy, create protective barriers and perform amazing physical feats. Gwenyr yearned to wield such power, but no matter how hard she tried, the All-Being withheld these gifts. Anger festered - resentment against those who had wronged her, those who had abandoned her. It all came to a head when she lashed out at Kyarin and fled their camp in shame.

For months, she wandered the Kingdom of Ire, expecting to slip back into a life of poverty and crime. Yet the All-Being had other plans. Subtly, inexorably, she was drawn to a seedy bar in the city of Valeur, where fate awaited her in the most unlikely of forms - her older half-sister Sigrid. A wylding wielder and full-blooded Dracim, Sigrid was everything Gwenyr was not. And yet, against her instincts - perhaps guided by Kyarin's wisdom, or perhaps by the drink - she agreed to travel with her.

- Attributes:
  - Strength: ⬢⬢⬢⬡⬡
  - Mobility: ⬢⬢⬢⬡⬡
  - Intelligence: ⬢⬢⬢⬡⬡
  - Reflexes: ⬢⬢⬢⬢⬡
  - Focus: ⬢⬢⬡⬡⬡
  - Grit: ⬢⬢⬢⬡⬡
- Trained Skills:
  - Culture, Physical, Resolve, Awareness, Stealth, Apothecary.
  - Finesse, Brawn.
- **Traits:** All-Monk (Resources), Martial Artist (Physical).
- Equipment:
  - Powerful Fists (Mace, Steel with Shield), Strong Body (Scale, Ability - All-Power), Charms, Toolboxes (Physical, Stealth and Apothecary), Torch.

Wild Folk

- See Twisted Forest write-up from pg: 118.

"Though the uncommon folk may raise a quizzical eyebrow and prompt hushed questions, the people of Akharon are largely accustomed to their world containing many different species. This is especially true of the nations that can trace their heritage back to the ancient Empire of Catla - the Kingdom of Ire, Holy Kingdom of Catla, Tarquinius Republic and Panos Theocracy - as the Druidic War has forced each to be a multi-species nation.

Though given enough time, I suspect biology will mandate that most lands will return to being single species. I hope this comes about through marriages and babies, and not war and tyranny."

- Edrina Folkwood,
Kaltoran grandmother.

In the wild lands where the dark Twisted Forest meets civilisation, frontier settlements are bastions of rugged perseverance and diverse inhabitants. In these raw and often perilous settlements, every soul has a history, and many histories are a secret. Here, Creet, Dracim, Kaltoran, Legion, Remnant, Tolatl, Twi-Far and all religions must share lives unlike anywhere else. Building their homes on the edges of civilisation where the rule of law is tenuous at best, and the ability to both depend on your neighbour and make use of what resources you have is a matter of survival.

Though their stories may be revealed as trust is built, all know not to probe where there is resistance to share. What matters is the here and now - who can fix a roof before the storm hits, who knows how to forage for food, who can stand watch through the night. Ancient prejudices and a person's uncommon nature fade in the face of daily struggles against bandit raids, harsh winters, and the ever-present threat of village-slaughtering monsters.

It is in such a place where the truly rare and strange folk of the world may find a home. These have come to be known as the Wild Folk, as they often wander in from untamed lands. Thinking Golems, non-bestial Neph Spawn, runaway Dryads, lost Elementals, children of fey Elves and even reformist Vampires. All can find a community in a frontier settlement, even if they are to never find another of their species.

It was not so long ago that both Creet and Twi-Far were considered myths, and Dracim did not even exist. Now all three occupy prominent places within many nations of Akharon, and none know who will next come in from the wilds to join their nation.

- PCs should feel free to be a Wild Folk, though they will need both GM permission and to think about how they will fit into society.
- Those of particular monstrous appearance or reputation - such as Neph Spawn - may struggle more than others. Though a simple hooded robe and a low profile will prevent most issues.

Automaton (Robot)

- See Dray write-up from pg: 186.
- See Murder of Pol on pg: 65.

"With a swift and determined strike, my sword struck the beast with a satisfying crunch as steel met with hardened bone beneath ashen flesh, though to no true effect. My stroke cut deep but yielded no lasting harm as the shambling fiend continued its relentless advance without pause. I might as well have been fighting a slow-motion avalanche for all the progress I was making."

- Sir Thalion Icebay,
recount of an Automation of Dray.

Metalic creatures were common servants when the gods walked Akharon, particularly for those who have held the domain of metal; namely Pol and then Dray. They are commonly found guarding ancient divine ruins, slumbering beneath the earth or in the workshops of eccentric techno-mages. Automations go by many names and classifications. Most are unintelligent tools that were created for specific tasks. But some are thinking creatures, as much as any man or woman of flesh, blood and breath.

Automatons of Dray

- **Eternal Creator:** Dray.
- **Common Motivations:** Their last orders, territorial.
- **True Nature:** Organic robots, known as FLESH, were created by the Nephilim to be workers for the Corporation.

Created by the god of craftsmanship before he had taken on Pol's domain of metal, these grey fleshly machine people are incredibly strong, simple-minded and relentless in their set duties. Despite living in collapsed ruins with bodies that are falling apart, they are incredibly tough and continue to attempt to perform their tasks even if it is impossible to complete. They will often shuffle about their domain moving empty boxes between rooms, operate switches for great machines that no longer work, make use of faltering arcane tools to fix walls that are beyond repair, or expand their divine ruin with new rooms that serve no purpose.

Children of Pol (NPC)

- **Eternal Creator:** Pol.
- **Common Motivations:** Kill sentient organic life.
- **True Nature:** Radiation-leaking murder robots with tortured digitized human minds that were called Mechonids. Some have been infected by nanites who have reworked their minds to truly believe in Pol and the stories of the Eternal gods. Some of their technology has also started to take on elaborate 'fantasy-arcane' aesthetic.

Crafted in the likeness of their divine maker, these arcane mechanical entities were imbued with life by Pol, the god of metal and magic. Their original purpose was to gather and safeguard arcane knowledge, and to protect all Akharonians during the Age of Darkness. They manifest in diverse forms, ranging from small beetle-like creatures to towering spheres in a swirl of appendages.

Yet all share a common trait: their lustrous steel frames, glowing purple interiors and an aura of pain.

All Children were mentally connected to their master when he was slain by the goddess Neph for defending Akh and Ath, and they went mad with grief and anguish as his body fell from heaven. The mind of all Children of Pol is a prison of endless suffering, and many an enchanter has gone insane after reading their thoughts.

Realty is so painful for the Children of Pol that they are forced to sleep for decades at a time, usually in a divine ruin or around a source of arcane power. Using techno-magic or making loud noises near a slumbering Child may awaken them, and none can rage from an interrupted dream quite like a Child of Pol. Much of Akharon was reshaped during the Druidic War, which both buried and revealed many Children of Pol.

These servants of the late Pol are among the greatest sources of techno-magical components on Akharon. Though not all of their parts are usable, as their corrupting aura taints much of their metal and may inflict people with an incurable sickness. Long-term exposure to the Children of Pol can cause nausea, vomiting, diarrhoea, fever, fatigue, dizziness, headache and skin burns. They are a curse to all life. Pol's Children are unmatched in their mastery over techno-magic. Their weapons can disintegrate flesh (leaving behind all metal), banish away steel and harness the power of lightning. Child leaders are also able to teleport themselves and reinforcements.

Forged

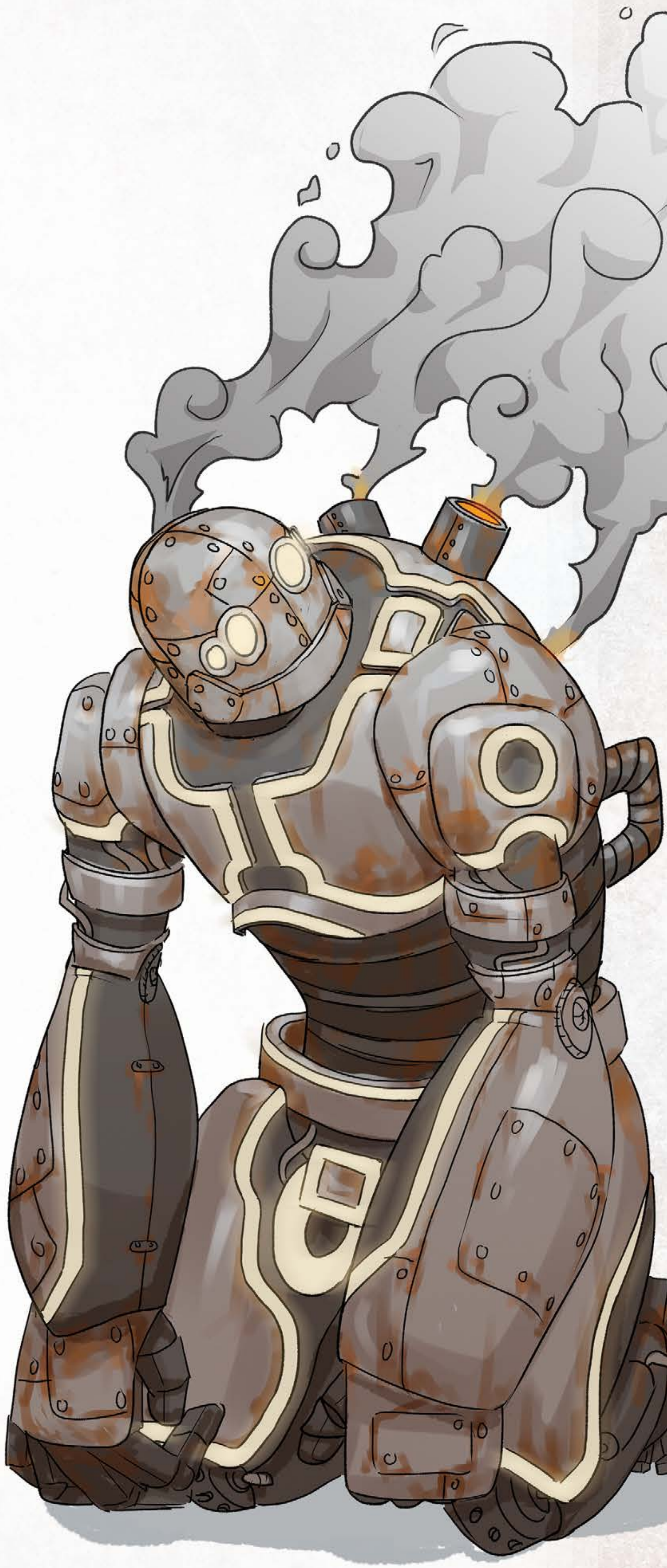
- **True Nature:** Often made of Synth Steel that has been reprogrammed by nanites to take on the form of clockwork guardians. Others are Corp, Kaltoran, Legion or Palantor robots of traditional construction.

Metalic creations of Dray (often commissioned by the goddess Corp) that were created after he took up the domain of metal from his fallen brother Pol. Their minds are akin to Automations, though their forms and tools are often more complex.

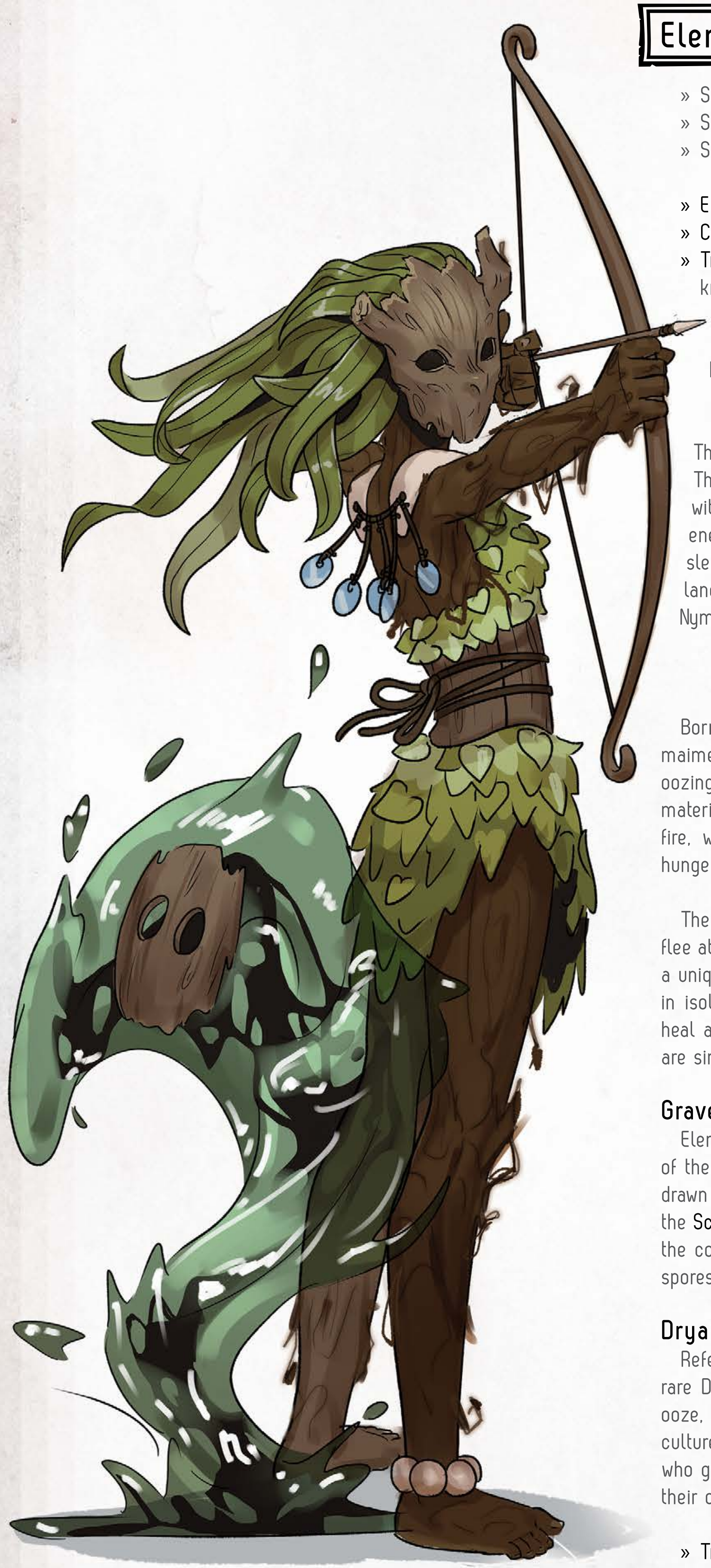
Golem

In recent times techno-mages have learned to create great and small constructs of forged iron shells that are held together by heavy bolts and given life through organs harvested from divine metalic servants: such as Children of Pol and Forge Soldiers. Most are brutish and dim of mind – suited only to guard duty or crude manual labour –, some go wild with rage and seek to destroy all intelligent life (starting with their creator), but a tiny few have the spark of true thought.

Those of intelligence have no people of their own and often outlive their creators (who have often spent most of their lives learning to create just one thinking Golem). Most end up roaming the land with a crushing loneliness. They learn to fear simple-minded folk, and wear hooded clothing to not draw attention to themselves.



Techno-magic Golem.



Water Elemental and Dryad.

Elemental, Dryad & Nymph

- See Grave & Morass Mountain Elementals write-up on pg: 137.
- See Zowilza, Elemental King write-up from pg: 203.
- See history of the wounding of Ugra'thok on pg: 66.

- **Eternal Creator**: Ugra'thok.
- **Common Motivations**: Hunger (especially Neph Spawn).
- **True Nature**: Genetically engineered black goo-creatures known as Zhou. The Zhou settled on Akharon shortly after the arrival of the Corporation, and their genetics have been altered to cripple their growth; forcing them to create bodies for themselves out of available materials.

> "Elementals are strange, wonderous and dangerous creatures. They were accidentally created when a mortal wounded a god. They are made up of nature itself and seek to live in harmony with the wilds of Akharon... but have always seemingly been an enemy of all goddesses of nature. Most do little more than eat, sleep, eat, move and eat again... but they have a culture, even language. The largest are incredibly smart, and their Dryads and Nymphs even wear clothes and use crafted weapons."
>
> – Master Dajaro Greensky,
> Observation of the Wild, Vol XII.

Born out of the dark blood of the god Ugra'thok when he was maimed by the Twi-Far hero Faren Drasong, the Elementals are black oozing creatures that craft bodies for themselves from physical materials; such as dirt, stone, wood and water. All Elementals fear fire, wear a face-like mask and are consumed by an insatiable hunger, especially for Neph Spawn (including Dracim) and wylding.

They are incredibly hard to kill, as their black ooze will instantly flee at the exact moment that their shaped body falls. Despite having a unique language of bumping and rattling stones, they tend to live in isolation as larger Elementals consume others of their kind to heal and grow. Small Elementals are especially vulnerable as they are simple-minded creatures.

Grave & Morass Mountains

Elementals are found most commonly along the eastern border of the Kingdom of Ire in the Grave and Morass Mountains. They are drawn to the region as it is ruled over by their wise king **Zowilza** from the **Scar of Ascendence**. Their nature guards the realm of Ire against the corruption of the Warped Kingdom as they eat the vile wylding spores and would-be Dracim raiders that cross their domain.

Dryads & Nymphs

Referred to by some as Elemental shepherds. The mysterious and rare Dryads and Nymphs have bodies formed mostly of their dark ooze, make use of clothing, tools and have an air of wisdom and culture about them. They tend to the well-being of wilder Elementals who grow too large or small; cutting down the former and giving of their own flesh to the later.

- **Truth**: Dryads and Nymphs are a more typical Zhou.

Fey & Elves

- **Eternal God Creators:** Nix, Etso & Fik.
- **Common Motivations:** Entertainment, respect.

The mischievous and unpredictable fey are among the most dangerous creatures of Akharon as they operate according to their own set of rules and customs that people may not understand or respect. They are gifted with immense powers of enchantment and take delight in toying with mortals. Fey love to be entertained and honoured, and will quickly grow malicious if provoked.

Fairies, Imps, Pixies & Sprites (NPC)

These most common of Fey have the likeness of insects and small animals. They have a purple and black glow and when their bodies die their magical essence will visibly leave their corpse to find a new host. Enchanters, witches and powerful fey regularly summon these small creatures to act as aids and guards.

- **Truth:** These are small animals and insects who are overwhelmed by an infestation of psionic nanites.

Elves

Little is known of the elegant elves as they reside in the deepest wooded lands and shun contact with outsiders. They have a Kaltoran-like nature with twin pointed ears and dreadlock hair, but they have much longer lives and a spiritual connection to Akharon that causes them to physically flourish or suffer along with the world. The Verdant Creet are rumoured to have a connection with the Elves, trading rare materials and food for Elven tools and art.

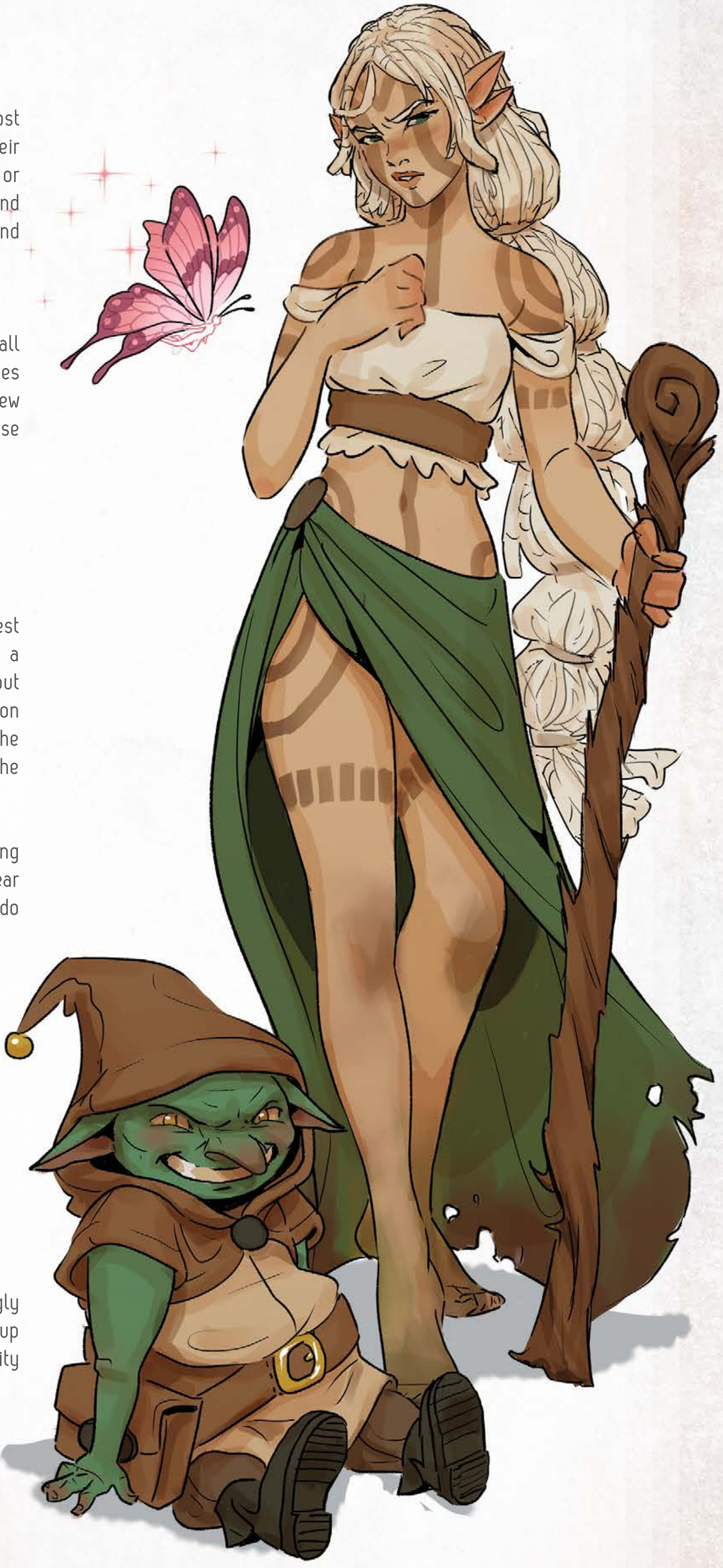
Some believe Elven spies live among the civilised nations, blending in with Kaltoran communities to learn their ways. Kaltorans fear Elven contamination of their families, as it is rumoured that they do not carry the memories of their ancestors.

- **Truth:** The original Elves were Kaltorans who infected themselves and their children with modified psionic nanites that were programmed to remove negative ancestral memories. It was successful, but took too much of their minds – especially from their children – and developed an agenda of their own. The nanites came to believe in magic, a false history of Akharon and the Eternal gods. They escaped containment and started to modify other nanites and reprogram technology and people's minds to match their sense of reality.

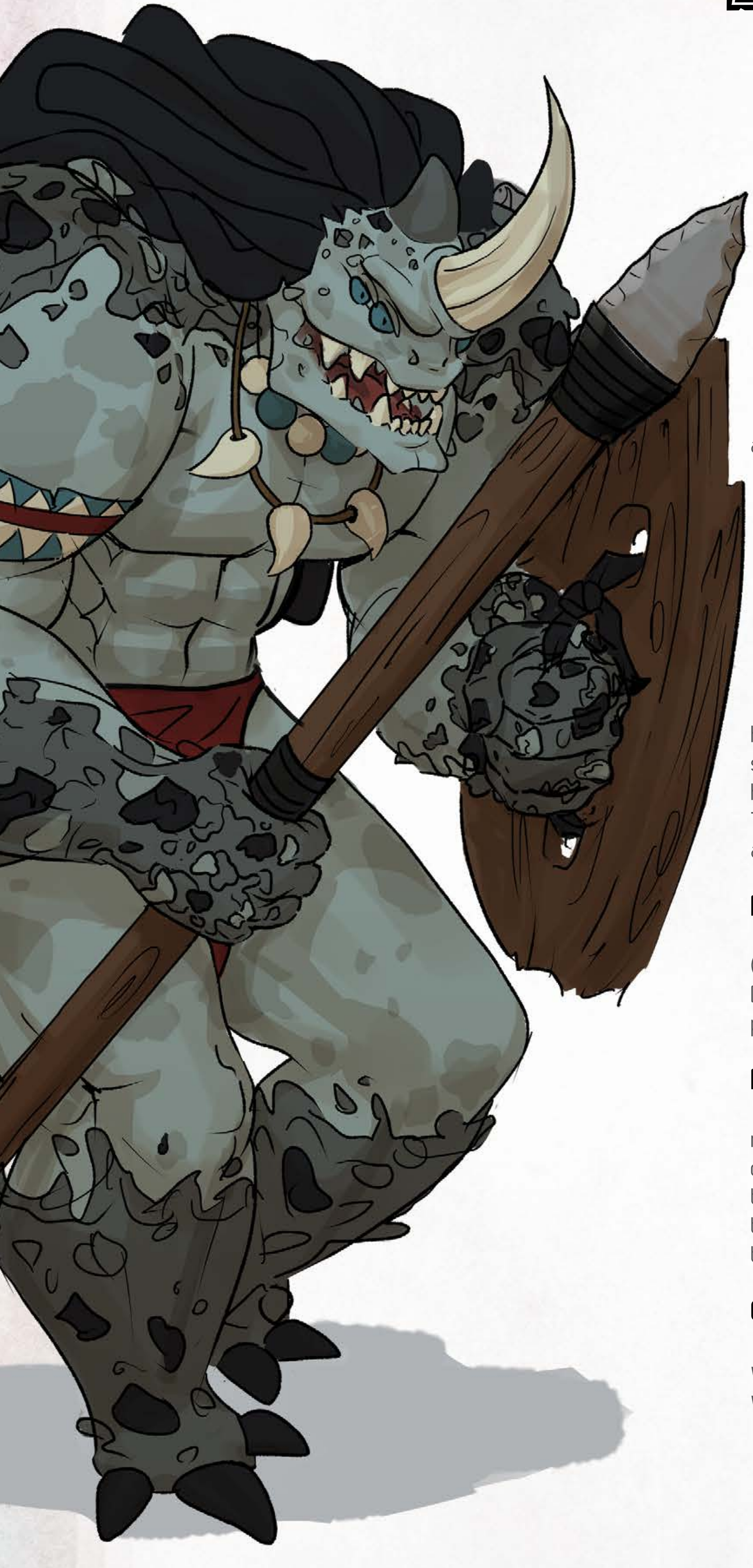
Goblins (NPC)

The most powerful of the fey, goblines are small and ugly creatures who live outside time and for the pleasure of stirring up trouble. To look into their grinning face is to lose your hold on reality as you see glimpses of possible pasts and futures.

- **Truth:** Goblins are young children who have been infested by a dense swarm of nanites; their bodies and minds have not been allowed to mature, but their forms still age giving them an unsightly wrinkled and frightful appearance.



Goblin, Fairy and Elf enchanter.


Tribal Neph Spawn.

Neph Spawn

- **Eternal Creator:** Neph.
- **Common Motivations:** Survival & territorial.
- **True Nature:** Nephilim.

> "Ah yes, the Neph Spawn. Also known as Nature Demons, Servants of the Wild or Wylding Fiends. With all of our so-called advancements, we are but a shadow of their power. Without iron or forges, their claws are as strong as swords and their carapaces as durable as knight's plate. Without techno-magic they can melt stone with their acid spit and without words they outwit our greatest generals."
>
> – Hall Master Elijah Cogwise,
> All for Naught, Vol I.

Neph Spawn has two broad meanings. In a scholarly sense, it covers all creatures created by the dead goddess Neph or her wydling magic; such as Chompers, Dracim, Dragons, Fungizombies and possibly even Giants and Trolls. Though in common language this term is only used to describe the most monstrous of creatures that infest the Twisted Forest and other untamed lands – especially those that defy natural conventions and are without a name. To be labelled a Neph Spawn is to be called a demon of nature.

Common features include chitinous exoskeletons, razor-sharp claws, head tendrils, fanged maws and insectoid appearances. Some have many limbs, flesh as tough as forged steel, bleed poison or can spew acid that melts stone. Many can mutate their forms to adapt to harsh environments and new threats if they gain access to wylding. Their collective appearance embodies a nightmarish fusion of beast and organic magic.

Neph's Decline

Most Neph Spawn suffer from an ailment known as Neph's Decline (pg: 15), rendering their minds simple and beastal. But since the Druidic War, some have started to gain intelligence due to the rise of powerful wylding wielders in the world.

Nijin & Jinin

Neph Spawn and the new goddesses of nature have a difficult relationship where both are seemingly unsure of how to relate to the other. Neph Spawn were created to serve the late goddess Neph and to destroy civilisation, but the new divine twins that have replaced their mother are still finding their place in the world and are warmer towards civilisation.

Created & Infected

Many monsters are not pure Neph Spawn, but are created by wylding wielders or are people who have been infected by raw wylding magic.

Chimera

These abominations are the failed experiments of wylding wielders who have attempted to craft creatures beyond their abilities. A fusion of multiple beasts with an insane mind that seeks only to kill and destroy.

Therianthropes

Many desperate souls who have been mutated by wylding magic will seek out wielders to cure their monstrous curse. Such attempts are rarely successful but some can suppress the physical nature of an ailment. Allowing the cursed individual to live as a normal person… except for those unfortunate nights when the suppression magic fails and they are returned to their beastly forms for a time. The two-faced goddess Corp seemingly takes pleasure in tormenting such poor souls.

- **Truth:** The 'magic' used by wylding wielders to suppress the physical appearance of Nephilim traits is a mutagenic serum that was designed for spies during the X'ion War to hide Nephilim and their bio-engineered powers. Psionic nanites see these people as Therianthropes and reverse their power during a full moon as it is narratively appropriate to them.

Vampires

- **Eternal Creator:** Nix.
- **Common Motivations:** Control, thirst for blood & power.

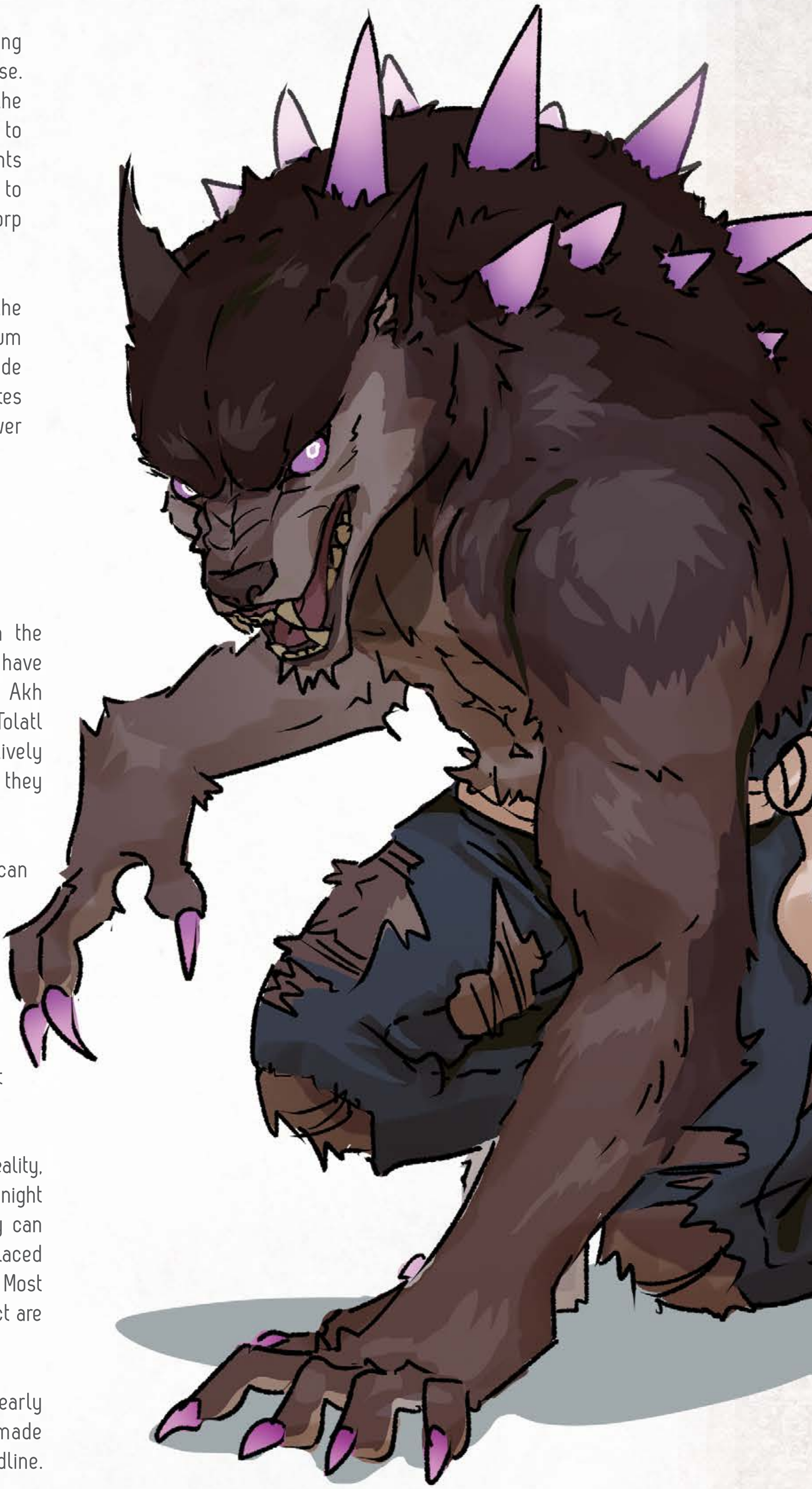
Ancient Vampires were born of secret dalliances between the goddess Nix and other deities during her youthful years. They have demigod-like power and are particularly hated by the sun gods Akh and Ath as they played a role in revealing the creation of the Tolatl and Legion to the goddess Neph. To this day, both sun gods actively seek to strike them and their spawn down, and Tolatl will die if they are turned by a lesser Vampire.

Despite legends, Vampires are not the walking dead, but they can regenerate from almost any wound if given enough food and rest. They have pale complexions (a common trait among the aristocracy), extendable blood-sucking fangs, and incredible strength, speed and senses. They're also gifted enchanters who can manipulate the minds of both animals and people. Despite their charming demeanour and keen sense of fashion, there is a beast within every vampire. An insatiable monster that demands blood and power.

The myths surrounding Vampires have long outpaced reality, especially in rural villages where the blood-sucking undead of the night are regularly blamed for local woes. Most peasants believe they can ward them off with garlic, overpriced holy trinkets and a well-placed wooden steak, but separating fiction from reality is difficult. Most so-called vampire hunters are charlatans, and books on the subject are primarily written to evoke a sense of drama and excitement.

Discerning their true strengths, powers and weaknesses nearly always requires direct confrontation and experimentation. A task made all the more difficult by the variances within each Vampire bloodline.

- **Truth:** Vampirism is a Nephilim-engineered blood-borne pathogen that was intended to duplicate the ability of nanites to create psionic powers by altering a host's genetics.



Werewolf Therianthrope.

Short Story:
Ruins of Dray

The setting twin suns of Akharon shone through the dense, towering trees that lined the rough forest path. Taking the lead, Izel tried to ignore how the eyes of his three companions were on his back, likely looking to him to decide everything from their pace to when it was time to make camp. The Tolatl techno-mage was already feeling the weariness weep into his short legs, but no one else seemed to be complaining, and so he pressed on, ignoring his aching feet.

Behind him strode Sigrid, Dracim sporemancer, looking quite at home in the leafy surrounds; as expected of one who spent much of her life in the wilds. With draconic yellow scales and dark horns sprouting from her head, she would have struck a regal figure, were it not for her simple leather clothing and the gnarled wooden stave in her hand.

Behind her stalked Gwenyr, clad in hooded robes. She bore the unmistakable traits of her mixed parentage; the red skin of a Twi-Far, and the gnarled horns borne by Dracim. Izel had no issues with the gloomy young All-Monk joining their group, especially since Sigrid had vouched for her as her half-sister. Strands of Gwenyr's dark hair framed eyes that carried near permanent disdain, not quite the monk-like serenity Izel had anticipated.

Leading their red pack elk at the rear was Jotar, the final member of their group and a stalwart presence Izel had grown to trust. The imposing Creet had accompanied Izel on his very first mercenary job, many years back when the Tolatl was still sneaking out of his family's stuffy mansion for secret midnight capers. The meeting of techno-magic and raw strength had strengthened their partnership over time, crafting an odd friendship that bridged their wildly differing heights. The Creet's arms were crystalline, gleaming green to his upper forearms, and he wore only boots and rough-spun trousers. Jotar's elaborately braided beard fell over a broad chest, and he carried a massive stone hammer over his shoulder as easily as if it were hollow wood. Rök, Jotar's horned, white-furred sekhound, trotted placidly at his master's feet.

An eclectic bunch, Izel thought, far from the first time those words had crossed his mind. Seigneur Louis Valdis had sent out the call for a fiendishly dangerous job, and it was clear from a glance at the request that a party of two – two and a half, including Rök – would have them laughed out of the Lord's mansion. Recruiting Sigrid and Gwenyr seemed to do the trick, netting them the contract and doubling their pool of skills. They were going to need it.

"That should be enough for today," Sigrid announced, coming to a stop in the middle of the road.

Izel blinked as the other two looked around. "Excuse me?"

"Here." Sigrid cheerfully motioned to a tiny patch of clearing off the path. "We should make camp before the nasties come out to play."

Izel went to disagree – politely – hoping to assert some authority over the group he'd assembled. He had time only to open his mouth before Jotar grunted, making his way through the foliage and following Sigrid to the clearing. Gwenyr let loose with a sharp sigh before doing the same. The Tolatl hastened to catch up, his tiny legs moving at double the speed of everyone else's. "It just seems like a very small clearing," he explained, narrowly avoiding hooking his foot on a thick tree root. "Bit cozy, wouldn't you say?"

Sigrid responded by raising her wooden stave. The Dracim's brow furrowed in concentration, and green magic coursed along the length of her arm, emanating from the tip of her stave in pulses that rippled through the forest floor. The woods leaned away from the clearing, roots slithering outwards and trees withdrawing from their long-entrenched positions. When Sigrid lowered her arm, there lay a far more expansive clearing, trees twisted at odd angles as if they had recoiled in fear.

Jotar cast Izel a concerned look, but Sigrid looked pleased with herself as she strode to the clearing's centre. "Fire's not going to build itself. Chop, chop!"

An hour later, the dipping suns cast their campsite into rapidly fading dusk. Sigrid was contentedly stirring the pot of soup warming over their merrily crackling campfire, while Gwenyr had unsubtly placed herself on the exact opposite side. The monk sat with her face in shadow from the hood of her crimson cloak, firelight flickering in her eyes. Jotar had planted himself near the clearing's edge, and was brushing their pack elk's mane with smooth, delicate strokes, an oddly gentle sight for one with such rough hands.

Izel's gaze nervously darted between each member of his assembled party. He knew from experience that Jotar was unfond of idle chatter, but the atmosphere between the other two wasn't quite the tight-knit sisterly bond Sigrid had implied before they'd set out from the city of Valeur. He tried to busy himself with his gloves, which – fortunately or otherwise – were proving quite the challenge. These artefacts were his pride and joy, the fruit of many years secretly studying techno-magic without the knowledge of his stuffy noble parents. Yellow, blue, green… each of the dials summoned forth a unique source of power that could be woven into a spell.

Then there was the orange dial. Izel had used this only a single time. Once his family started to ask awkward questions as to why their entire library had been consumed in a violent inferno, Izel had vowed never to touch orange again.

Pushing his goggles back up onto his forehead, the young techno-mage cleared his throat. "Um, so… I've visited quite a few of Dray's temples. God of passion and construction, and all that. Think there's a chance we'll be running into any traps?"

Gwenyr shrugged. "We're exploring the temple of a false god. Snares and deception are a given."

Izel felt a strange mix of indignation at the dismissal of one of his gods, and mild panic as he realised he had no good response for her cutting remark.

Sigrid fixed Gwenyr with a look of exasperation. "After all these years, you still doubt the Eternal gods? If our parents' lessons didn't sink in, then the evidence is everywhere you look."

The expression Gwenyr gave her sister in return was practically enough to make her combust. "We're not children anymore. I've grown up to form my own ideas."

The jab bounced off Sigrid like a rubber arrowhead. "You'll see," she said primly, smiling as she tended to the fire. "Exploring an ancient temple to Dray should be quite the eye-opener."

Izel knew only a little of the pair: mainly that they'd been separated for years after Sigrid had left to learn the ways of wylding magic. The Dracim had seemed positively giddy at the chance to invite her sister into the group. So far, the family reunion had consisted mainly of one-sided glares.

"Is he joining us sometime this evening?" Sigrid was frowning at Jotar, who still stood at the clearing's far edge. "We've been on our feet all day. Does he intend to sleep standing up?" Her frown deepened. "Can Creet do that?"

"It's the clearing," Izel said, just happy to be changing the subject. He gestured to the recently parted space around them. "His people's history with magic is… fraught. Jotar means no offence, but you may have unsettled him."

"Unsettled by magic?" Sigrid scoffed, with a trilling laugh. "That's silly! He travels with a wylding sporemancer, a techno-mage and a…" She considered Gwenyr for a moment. "Well, whatever you'd call the spark of 'All-Power' that may or may not reside within my sister. Magic is the way of the world, sure as sun and stone."

"Oh, here we go," Gwenyr muttered.

"It is," Sigrid said firmly. "If Jotar were here to listen, I'm sure I could set his mind at ease regarding magic." She paused, and there was a flicker of sour recognition in her eyes. "Unless… perhaps it's only wyldling magic he finds unsettling?"

"Oh, I'm sure it's not…" Izel hastily began, only to be interrupted by a shadow passing over him from behind.

Jotar took his place near the fire, settling down into a seated position. "Such grand displays of magic can attract unwanted attention. I was merely ensuring that our camp was secure, and that the animals were at ease." Rök trotted to the Creet's side and made a show of spinning around multiple times before lying down, clearly content. "Truly, I cast no aspersions on your chosen path," Jotar quietly finished.

Sigrid stared at him for a moment, then turned back to the soup pot with a sigh. “Well, you’re more polite than most. Honestly, with the way people talk about wyldling magic…” She began to stir the soup with more force than was necessary. “Cursed. Impure. Foul. I’ve heard it all.” The movements of the ladle reached alarming speed, such that Izel feared their dinner would soon be surging over the sides of the pot and into the dirt. Still, the Dracim smiled; an almost manic expression. “Some even say ‘Druidic’. Can you fathom it? Comparing us to that evil cabal who slaughtered millions and brought civilisation to a knife’s edge. My blood boils at the…”

“Ooh, if my nose is correct, I’d say dinner is ready!”

Everyone froze at the sound of an entirely new voice. All attention swung towards a figure sitting next to the fire; an elderly Kaltoran. Her skin was leathery, eyes twinkling with mischief, and she wore the dark cloak and oversized pointed hat of a witch, the peak of the latter was so bent that it had to be done on purpose.

Jotar quickly stood, eyes narrowed. “Who are you?”

“And how do you move so quietly?” Sigrid added, sounding more impressed than shocked.

The witch grinned, proudly showcasing her missing teeth. “Why, don’t you know?” Hands formed into claws, she raised her arms skyward in a dramatic gesture. “I am… the witch of the valley!” The old lady lowered her arms, brow furrowed. “Or… the witch of the forest. I forget the locals’ current name for me.”

“You’re from the valley near here?” Izel tentatively asked.

The old crone snapped her fingers. “That’s the one! Lend me a bite to eat, and I’ll tell you all about the unearthed temple that you so obviously seek.”

Rök made his way to the witch’s side. The hound sniffed her cloak, wagged his tail and curled up next to her, as content as could be. The simple act caused some of the tension to evaporate, and Izel felt his curiosity seeping back in. “You know about the temple?”

“Everybody and their sekhound knows of the temple to Dray. Talk of the region for some time now,” the old Kaltoran crowed. Without waiting to be asked, she pulled a small wooden bowl from the inside of her robes and began spooning soup from the pot over the campfire. Taking more than her fair share of meaty lumps. “It was… let’s see. Sixteen moons ago? A few farmers digging where they weren’t welcome, and then sure as the stench of Ugra’thok, there’s the front door to a temple of Dray. Six feet under the dirt!”

“We were hired to explore and purify the place,” Sigrid said, settling into a prim and proper seated position. “But surely looters must have broken in by now.”

“Not that I know of. Techno-magically sealed door, y’see,” the witch replied, in between noisy slurps of her soup. “For now, it’s sealed up tight. Our bumpkin peasants could scratch their heads for a thousand years and never get a peek inside.”

“Techno-magic seal?” Izel repeated. A thrill of excitement was now coursing down his spine as his imagination fired, crafting images of the bounty that lay within the temple’s ancient halls.

“Probably untouched since the Druidic War,” Jotar rumbled. “History tells us that the ground was torn asunder; great cities razed, only to become forests over the ages.”

“Enough chaos for a temple to fall through the earth,” Gwenyr murmured.

The witch pointed to the Twin Blood with her spoon. “Quite right. If you folks manage to set foot in there… ooh, just imagine that treasure trove!”

Izel didn’t need any encouragement. He was already half lost in a pleasant dream, eyes sparkling, his mind firing one thrilling image after another. He opened his mouth to ask more questions, but found that he was talking only to empty air. Rök was on his feet, spinning around with a look of confusion on his canine face.

“Magic,” Jotar mused. He sighed, clambering to his feet. “I’ll have a look around, and then take the first watch. Save me some soup.” He turned and began to take slow, steady steps into the darkness of the forest, Rök trotting at his heels.

With a long, low sigh, Gwenyr pulled a roll of bedding from her pack. “Wonderful. We haven’t even reached the valley and already the crazies are out in force.” She spread the roll out on the ground and sank into a lying position, facing away from the fire. “I’m not hungry. If you need me to keep watch, just give me a poke.”

Izel’s head was still spinning from the night’s events when he heard a whisper, so subtle that it was as if the words were spoken inside his mind.

“A gift, as thanks for the meal, and to give your journey true purpose.”

A glint where the old Kaltoran had been sitting caught his eye, and he scrambled over to where three slender objects lay atop a strip of white cloth. They were glass shards, each only a few inches long and tinted purple. Upon closer inspection, Izel saw that the shades varied between each fragment: a dark amethyst for the one on the left, violet in the centre, and the one on the right shimmered a delicate lilac.

The Tolatl techno-mage experimentally prodded the middle shard with a gloved hand. When no magical calamity ensued, he risked picking it up, peering into its depths. For a moment, all he saw was the reflection of flickering firelight in his own eye. And then, a flash of insight so strong he was suddenly reeling back, almost tripping over his own tail. The vision had been swift, an almost incomprehensible flash of pure instinct that vanished from memory. The meaning, however, had been frighteningly clear.

The shard was only part of a whole. No… all three were part of something truly magnificent. They demanded to be restored.

Jotar was out patrolling, Gwenyr had turned over, and Sigrid had her back to him. No one had noticed the shards, and Izel hastily wrapped up the cloth, stashing it in his satchel. Humming to herself, Sigrid spooned soup into a bowl and handed it to him with a bright smile. "We haven't even reached the temple, and already we're meeting interesting people. Is mercenary work always this exciting?"

Feeling slightly dazed as a soft fog lifted from his mind, Izel accepted the bowl of steaming vittles. However he'd expected this adventure to progress, things seemed to be veering far off the trail and into the wilds of the unexpected rather swifly.

* * *

The gleaming circular bronze door sat at the foot of a small, shoddily dug slope at the valley's dead centre, clashing with the gentle grassy inclines on either side that formed the sleepy valley. For around the tenth time, Sigrid glanced up at the twin suns, judging that Izel had now been working on the door for about an hour. The Tolatl's enthusiasm had clearly waned since they'd arrived, although he was putting on a good show of looking like he knew how to solve whatever puzzle the temple's ancient priests had used to seal the entrance. To a Dracim sporemancer, it just looked like a mess of clicking gears and sliding spheres.

Off in the distance, a small crowd of curious peasants had gathered to gape at the motley mercenary crew. Clearly, the unearthing of the temple had interrupted endless days of tilling and ploughing with a welcome burst of excitement, and yet none dared to venture too close.

Nearby, Gwenyr paced. Their icy reunion had bothered Sigrid far more than she cared to show: she'd spent years with the wylding coven away from her family, certainly, but this rift still felt inexplicable. As expected, her sister had thrived in her absence, finding purpose with her new All-Faith religion. When Gwenyr had accepted her invitation to join this expedition, it seemed like all could be as it was when they were children – but they'd barely shared a few words since setting out.

"This feels wrong," Jotar said quietly, so that only Sigrid could accidently hear.

Sigrid looked up from where she'd been tracing patterns with her stave in the dust. "The mysterious buried temple sealed tight by fiendish puzzle tomfoolery? Yes, I'd say it is a little unsettling."

The Creet was on one knee, absently scratching Rök's ears as the sekhound snoozed in the sunlight. "Dray was content for his own temple to be buried beneath the earth, sealed behind barriers that even his own faithful cannot access. I cannot help but wonder why." Jotar shot the door a look of suspicion, as if expecting it to sprout claws and swipe Izel's head clean off. "Our purpose here is to disturb that which was buried. No matter what sleeps below, be it god or beast, we must exercise extreme caution."

"Knowledge of temples and gods is quite a claim," Sigrid countered. "Especially for one with such a strong aversion to their magic."

The Creet shook his head. "You misunderstand. I approach magic with caution, to be sure, and yet I strive to understand. Knowledge allows one to discern that which should be feared."

Sigrid stared up at Jotar in genuine surprise. "And how do you strive to understand, exactly?"

"I study."

He spoke with such unflinching rigidity that Sigrid couldn't help but snort with laughter, although she felt a minor twinge of guilt afterwards. "Pardon my bluntness, but you look far more accustomed to stonework than scholarship."

"And yet, I find time for both." Jotar gave her an appraising look. "For example? I know it was the strength of your wylding magic that drew a witch into our camp." He lowered his voice, so that he spoke only to her. "You use sporemancy with such abandon, but think of what parts of the wilds you are allowing to take root in your soul."

To Sigrid's credit, the comment surprised her for only a moment. Before she could unleash the devastatingly witty response on the tip of her tongue, Izel turned on his heel, stomping back up the slope. With a handkerchief draped over the end of his tail, he dabbed at his sweat-coated forehead, arms tightly folded. "Nothing," he hissed. "I've tried every combination. Tried using runes, gestures, artefacts and bindings. I even called out to Dray in prayer!"

"Still at square one, are we?" Gwenyr said, stalking over to the group. "I could give it a few punches if you like."

As Izel wrung his hands and muttered to himself, Sigrid took a long look at the door for the first time. Most of the bronze surface was etched with techno-magic equations: these meant little to her. Two massive gears sat side by side at the top of the circle, a third was installed at the bottom left, and one was oddly stuck in the door horizontally, jutting from its surface below and directly between the two largest gears. Sigrid's eyes trailed downwards, and below the horizontal gear – subtle and innocuous – was the symbol of Dray: a hammer with the head within a circle.

Up close, these were mere pieces of the puzzle. From her vantage point, Sigrid felt an idea spark as Jotar's words echoed through her mind. Barriers that even his own faithful cannot access… and what else? Buried beneath the earth. As much as she rankled at his presumptions regarding sporemancy, the words still struck a lingering chord.

Whether in fear of the druids, or some darker purpose, the ancient priests of Dray had sealed this temple even against themselves. But Sigrid's magic was far from the convoluted spells woven by techno-mages. Her magic was strong, its thread binding all life under the suns, rising up from the earth beneath their feet… which also happened to be exactly where the temple lay. "Surely…" she murmured, looking down to where she'd been tracing in the dust between patches of grass. There it was: a faint glint of bronze. The sporemancer pointed her stave at the ground, issued a command to the plant life, and the grass fled outwards in a wide spiral. Jotar grunted as the magical effect swept across the area, and Izel almost tumbled backwards down the slope.

"You mind telling us what…?" Gwenyr began, before glancing downwards and trailing off. "Oh."

Everyone did the same, and the truth was reflected back at them as surely as the sunlight off the bronze surface. They now stood on a massive metal circle, resembling the door at the foot of the slope, but far larger.

"How?" Izel began, jaw dropping as he took in the sight.

Sigrid shrugged, enjoying their awestruck expressions immensely. "I sensed metal beneath the grass. The room of the temple, I thought, until I took a look at the door." She pointed to the metal tableau with one elegant finger. "Twin suns above, while Dray works below."

Izel snapped his fingers. "A hidden entrance, of course! Marvellous work Sigrid!" The Tolatl was suddenly a blur, moving between the gears and spheres built into the horizontal surface. Despite their age and how they'd been concealed, each one turned and slid smoothly, until Izel stepped back with a look of triumph. "Now, to show myself a true techno-mage of Dray…" He knelt down, lightning crackling in the palm of his glove.

A flash of mystical energy surged through the metal surface, and then, the wind was rushing past as the four of them plummeted through what used to be the ground. The fall was mercifully short, and Gwenyr managed to land, catlike, in a crouch. Jotar also landed heavily on his feet, sending tremors through the ground; Rök came plummeting from above a moment later, the hound woofing slightly as he landed in his master's arms. The unlucky ones were Izel and Sigrid, who tumbled to an ungraceful stop in a heap on the floor. Feeling a number of aches that would surely be far worse come the morn, Sigrid grasped her stave from where it had fallen, using it to aid her to her feet. Izel seemed to have fared better; the diminutive Tolatl had sprung upright, patting his body to check that all his equipment was still in place.

> "The dice of destiny are always loaded with mystery and tipped toward adventure."
>
> – Earl Tlaloc Badulf.

They looked up just in time to see metal flowing over the roof like liquid. Sigrid reached out to the roots and plant life that had embedded itself in the ancient temple, whispering the very first wylding spell she'd ever learned, taught to her on that night when the coven had taken her from her home. Softly glowing spores began to drift from the living plant life, and in just moments, they had a source of light.

"By the gods…" Izel breathed as they finally had a moment to take in their surroundings.

The chamber was massive, but there was nary a bare patch of wall to be seen. Etched into the stone surfaces all around were fantastical, almost divinely mesmerising etchings, gleaming in the sporelight and dazzling in their complexity. Sigrid was vaguely aware of automatons; Dray worshippers often had tapestries or effigies of the ancient machines, all clunky gears and gleaming spheres, not unlike those they'd seen on the outer door. The rock walls here depicted something that seemed far beyond anything of that sort, all minuscule parts and criss-crossing, wire-thin etchings in dizzying patterns. The only thing interrupting the sight were hanging tapestries woven with colourful techno-magic patterns, the meticulously woven creations making for a dazzling contrast against the prodigious etchings displayed on the surrounding walls.

At the room's far end loomed a massive bronze statue that must have been Dray. The god was bent over a forge, a hammer clutched in one of his metallic hands and raised high over his head, almost unrecognisable as ornately shaped flames coated his body. Izel was already drifting in awe towards the statue, while Jotar eyed the effigy with the same suspicion he'd given the door.

"When you're all done gaping," Gwenyr snapped, "we have a serious problem."

The warning in her tone firmly wrested the attention of her three companions away from the room's aesthetics, and Sigrid glanced around to see movement at the twin archways on either side of the statue. The spores cast them partly in shadow, but their movements were stiff and unnatural, jerking between each step. They were not the movements of living creatures.

"Forge Soldiers!" Izel cried. The bulky metal beings dragged themselves through the archways – four on the right side, three on the other – clearly in a state of rusted decline, but imposing nonetheless. "I wasn't sure any would still be working. Long ago, the Keepers…"

"History lecture later," Gwenyr interrupted, running full pelt towards the nearest automaton on the right. A split-second later, Jotar roared and hefted his hammer, his footfalls pounding against the metallic floor as he charged towards those on the left, Rök bounding by his side.

The nearest soldier had dragged itself fully into the light: a crude imitation of life, eight feet tall with clicking and whirring gears that were visible within its cracked outer shell. It scuttled on four limbs to match four thick arms, and its unblinking yellow gaze swept over the intruders like a spotlight. "Unauthorized personnel detected," the one in the lead chirped in a tinny tone. "Initiating security protocols."

It used a three-pronged claw in an attempt to ensnare Gwenyr, but the agile monk ducked underneath and drove her bare fist into the underside of the soldier's elbow. The metal buckled, but she was already unleashing another elbow strike that connected with the side of the thing's head. The soldier shuddered, then tumbled over, still fruitlessly swiping at the air with its claws.

Sigrid couldn't help but be impressed – but there was work to do. She uttered a guttural command in a language no being with ears could comprehend: a language spoken by an autumnal world of whispering leaves. Her spores sank into the roots and plants that had burrowed their way into the chamber across the ages, and life began to sprout from their surfaces, taking shape around the bodies of long-dead automatons with unsettling speed. Sigrid's spore creatures clawed their way up from the moss and vines, limbs sprouting and rapidly twisting together: legs, arms, mossy blobs that served as heads, and little else. The sporemancer needed only to point her stave forward, and her green and metal soldiers lumbered forth to meet their enemy in battle.

"You are trespassing on Dray [redacted] property," chirped a Forge Soldier as it advanced, using a non-claw arm to blast a stream of flame towards Izel. "Your deaths may be recorded for quality and training purposes."

Izel had one hand outstretched, a faint blue barrier of tessellated octagonal shapes blossoming from his gauntlet and blocking the jet of fire. Sweat dripped from his brow as he desperately fended off the assault, but relief came a moment later as one of Sigrid's spore zombies lumbered into the automaton from behind, knocking it off its metal feet.

"Resistance is strongly discouraged," the soldier placidly stated as the spore zombie rained down blows on its metal skull. "Dray is an equal opportunity… bzzzzzzzz."

Izel shot Sigrid a brief glance of thanks, then turned a dial on his gauntlet. The light in his palm blazed green, sending a ball of emerald flame slamming into a Forge Soldier and melting its clicking gears even as it bucked and struggled.

Gwenyr was ducking and weaving, dodging the lumbering strikes from another Soldier. The monk moved as a blur, but this one's armour was in better shape, and her strikes barely slowed its advance. Sigrid sent a silent command, and three of her spore creatures piled onto the metallic bulk. The look Gwenyr shot Sigrid was significantly less grateful – but at the same time, the disdain she'd been expecting was absent. There was confusion there, Sigrid thought; surprise, suspicion, a strange recognition, all blended into one. Then her sister was turning to deliver a solid leaping knee strike to another soldier, and the moment was gone.

On the chamber's right side, Jotar brought his hammer down in an arc, crushing the head of a Forge Soldier to scrap. The victory cost him a gash to the shoulder, and the other two were closing in fast. The Soldier scuttled into striking range, a rusted blade sprouting from its third limb, scything downwards to where Rök was chomping on the metal leg of another soldier. Jotar caught the strike on one of his crystalline arms, casting a heavy ringing sound throughout the chamber. The Creet shoved the blade aside and dealt the Soldier a crushing blow with his fist. Crystal met steel and crystal triumphed, knocking the Soldier's head clean off its shoulders. The final foe raised its fourth arm, the only thus far to do so, and the tip of its finger began to glow red. Sigrid commanded two of her spore creations to tackle the machine just as it unleashed a beam of crackling crimson energy. The blast went wide as the Soldier was driven sideways, just barely searing Jotar's side. The Creet turned to his attacker, and Sigrid noticed him flinching as he took in the sight of the spore creatures. Whatever energy the thing possessed seemed to have been drained by its final shot, and it lay still as the fungizombies smashed it to pieces. Rök barked with vigour as he joined the fray, using the tiny horns on his head to repeatedly ram the Forge Soldier's head.

Izel and Gwenyr were making the rounds, ensuring that their downed foes were, in fact, downed. One dogged enemy drunkenly lumbered near to Sigrid, a small metal boomerang sticking from its neck; one of Izel's gadgets. "Pl-pl-please stand by," it drawled as the tiny device emptied magical lightning into its body. "D-d-d-ray thanks y-you for your p-p-p-atronage…"

Sigrid lashed out with her stave, knocking the hapless automaton onto its side. Its legs scuttled uselessly, seeking solid ground and finding none, before the whole thing went dead. There was a resounding clang as Jotar brought his hammer down on the skull of the final Forge Soldier, and then silence settled comfortably back over the chamber. Izel wheeled around, checking first that all his allies were still standing, and then patting himself down, as if he needed to confirm that all his limbs were still in place. Gwenyr's robes were singed, but from Sigrid's quick once-over, her sister seemed unharmed.

It was Jotar who bore the brunt of the wounds; gashes across his shoulders and chest, and a sickly crimson burn running along the side of his head. Hands glowing with forest green light, Sigrid moved towards him. "This might sting a bit, but it's better than…"

Jaw set and body tensed, Jotar shrank away from the light as if on instinct.

"It's healing," she firmly replied. "Just this once, shelve your caution and let me work."

The Creet remained unyielding, gazing down at the light still flowing between Sigrid's fingers as if it were a searing flame. The Dracim turned to her other companions with an exasperated look, imploring them to support her. Izel looked between the two with uncertainty, but to Sigrid's surprise, it was Gwenyr who sauntered up to Jotar, giving him a light punch to an uninjured part of his shoulder. "I understand. Zombies one minute, healing the next; life magic is just bizarre. But…" She swallowed, seeming to force out the words. "As a healer, she's one of the best. And we really don't want you limping behind us the whole way."

Jotar's jaw was tight, but he slowly exhaled, removing the hand he'd clamped over the wound on his shoulder. Sigrid approached with care, allowing the life energy to flood into the injury, caressing and smoothing until it knitted together to form unblemished flesh. She did the same for Jotar's burn, admiring how the burly Creet remained expressionless, and then progressed to healing the gash on his leg. A wave of dizziness assaulted Sigrid as she stepped back – healing made harsh demands of the practitioner – but she was satisfied with her work.

Izel had his body turned away from them, and as he rotated, Sigrid caught a flash of white as he stuffed a small cloth back into his satchel. "All healed up?" Izel said, poorly hiding his relief beneath cheer. "Then let's continue! Lots to see and do."

He made a grand, adventurous beckoning gesture before heading for the archway on the right with inexplicable confidence.

Jotar rolled his shoulder a few times. "My gratitude," he mumbled, moving to follow Izel. Rök tilted his head up at Sigrid, tongue lolling haphazardly and tail practically a blur with swift motions.

"And you're also very welcome," Sigrid told the sekhound. With a contented yip that echoed through the chamber, Rök ran in a deft circle before bounding after his master.

Sigrid saw Jotar surreptitiously run a hand over his unblemished face, and she felt a mote of satisfaction. Of course her skills had convinced him. No one could deny the life-giving power of wyldling magic after experiencing it first-hand. "Thank you," Sigrid said, speaking quietly enough that only Gwenyr could hear. "For the support, that is."

Gwenyr turned, her face inscrutable. Then she was gone, jogging to catch up with the other two. Sigrid watched her go, her confusion mounting as the knot in her stomach twisted itself just a little tighter.

* * *

Their path downwards was dark and cramped, and much of their pathway was littered with ancient bones and twisted metal. They quickly fell into a familiar, unsettling pattern: ancient corpse-strewn corridor, rooms pilfered of any real value, narrow spiral staircase, and then repeat. Gwenyr had never been one for temples, but she'd always imagined them as opulent and spacious. All the more room for flickering candles to cast the shadows of sinister divine frauds; enough floorspace for grandiose displays of sheer decadence.

As she trailed behind Izel along the latest narrow corridor, Gwenyr tried to banish the old thoughts, but they rose unbidden. They trod worn and comfortable pathways through her mind, roads that were supposed to be paved over with glorious thoughts of the All-Being; the one true god.

'Anger is like a burning coal. Holding onto it only consumes the bearer,' old monk Kyarin had told her; only one of his inexhaustible pearls of divine wisdom. 'To forgive is to set a prisoner free, and then realize that prisoner was you.'

She scowled to herself as her mentor's words echoed loud and strong. This, Gwenyr knew, was why the other All-Monks could practically levitate with the coursing golden power of the All-Being, casually punch through solid stone without so much as a twitch on their meditative expressions and heal grievous wounds with the simplest silent prayer. And here she was: the feisty, weaker half-sister, unable to call so much as a spark of her god's power. A true credit to her faith.

Gwenyr was so buried in her own chaotic thoughts that she almost tripped over Izel, who'd come to a dead stop in the corridor beyond. "Hey… warning, please?"

"Something caught your eye?" Sigrid asked from her position at the rear.

The rooms they'd passed thus far had been standard fare: prayer chambers with long-abandoned shrines, sleeping quarters with the desiccated remains of straw mats, and one room dedicated entirely to a wrap-around tapestry of Dray hammering out some marvellous creation at his forge. The god had been on full display, dressed in little more than his personality. Gwenyr had tried to avert her eyes, and failed.

Izel was peering into a barely lit room beyond a small archway, the rusted metal door hanging off its hinges like it had been violently wrenched. "There's a light," the Tolatl whispered. Without waiting for consent, he turned up the palm of his glove, now coursing with a blue glow, and wandered through the archway. Gwenyr moved to follow, then stopped dead as she took in the sight. Automatons of all shapes and sizes stood on small plinths, like this was some kind of perverse museum to techno-magical death machines. All were quiet and still, seemingly posed deliberately, but the sight of so many solid metal forms at once had Gwenyr's battle instincts screaming.

"Izel!" Jotar hissed, stalking past Gwenyr and placing a rough hand on the Tolatl's shoulder.

"They're dead," Izel replied, almost dreamlike. "All of them, dead. Except for one." He pointed upwards to the head of the room, where lay a rectangular plinth, and atop, a solid block of white marble. Jutting from the stone's surface was the top half of an elegantly crafted automaton, this one had a slender white torso, two arms and a head that lolled forward onto its chest. Almost impossibly, a thin shaft of light fell from the ceiling, alighting in front of the metal being. "Can't you feel the pulse?"

Before anyone could figure out what that meant, Izel was drifting forward yet again, trancelike. Jotar paused only to shoot Gwenyr and Sigrid a look that got the message across loud and clear: make sure those things don't wake up and stab and burn us all to death. At least, that was the message Gwenyr picked up. She was starting to like Jotar, but knowing him, it was something more like 'stand vigil'. Or 'guard the flank, you slaves to uncaring false gods'. It was one of the two. Before she could figure out which, Jotar and Rök were jogging to catch up with the apparently suicidal Tolatl.

"I think they actually are dead," Sigrid commented, breaking Gwenyr out of her pleasant reverie. The Dracim sporemancer was leaning in close to inspect the nearest metallic creation; a menacing machine with a steel sphere instead of legs and pincers instead of hands.

"You a techno-magic expert now?" Gwenyr shot back. She'd used the same tone from when they were children. Back then, it had sounded teasing. Coming from her adult mouth, the words were biting. To her own surprise, she regretted them almost instantly.

Sigrid didn't seem to notice, pointing to the corridor. "From all the bones and scrap on the way here? I think most of the invaders and defenders already finished each other off. Judging from the old-timey armour and decor, I reckon the priests sealed up this place during the Druidic War."

The other two had reached the marble plinth at the far end, and Izel was inspecting the broken-down automaton with a fascination bordering on reverence. The silence between the sisters elongated, starting off as uncomfortable, crossing the line into 'frosty', and then entering a nebulous dimension of time that felt like uncounted eons. Gwenyr drummed her fingers on the side of her leg, wishing fervently that one of the automatons would spring to life and try to slice off her head, just for the distraction.

"Why did you agree to come?" Sigrid said suddenly.

Taken aback, Gwenyr tried to think of a safe answer. "We're getting paid for this, aren't we?"

"Chasing coin doesn't seem very... monk-like."

Gwenyr's spike of frustration was familiar, almost nostalgic, as if they were both eight years old again, and Sigrid could get under her skin with no more than a handful of words. No matter how hard she tried, nothing would ever change. "And what does a wylding wielder want with money? Thinking of saving up for a nice city townhouse?"

Sigrid snorted with laughter, which just caused Gwenyr's throat to tighten even further. No reply of hers could ever get her sister riled up. That was strictly a one-way system. "We really don't know much about each other's paths, do we?" Sigrid said, the traces of mirth still lingering. "Maybe that's partly my fault."

That was the final straw. Gwenyr felt the dam inside her break, and no digging fingernails into her palms, no All-Faith mantras, were enough to stop heat flooding through her veins like a searing flame. "That must be a joke," she hissed. "Tell me, tell me now, that you're not so blind."

For the first time, she seemed to have Sigrid's complete attention. Something in her tone struck home, and her sister's eyes widened in uncertainty. "I... Gwenyr, what do you...?"

Warnings echoed in Gwenyr's head, some in her own voice, some in monk Kyarin's, but she swept them aside. A perverse part of her enjoyed the hurt steadily blossoming on her Dracim sister's face, a scant sliver of retribution that was sweet to the taste, but not enough to satisfy. "It's 'partly' your fault?" she demanded, taking a step forward, reducing the gap between them. "Only part, sister? You left me!"

"The wylding coven offered me a place," Sigrid whispered, shaking her head but seeming afraid to break eye contact. "I thought... one less mouth for our parents to feed..."

Gwenyr laughed, a caustic sound that made her sister flinch. "Oh, is that it? You were so very wise to the ways of the world, even as a child? You left your sister alone in the slums, because a few more bites of bread on the table would solve her ills?"

"You found your path," Sigrid replied, seeming to regain some of her confidence. "Just like I found mine. The wielders teach that..."

"I was alone!" Gwenyr yelled, cutting off the weak excuses. "I was a half-breed spat at by nobles in the streets and despised by my own stepfather, but at least I had a sister. Until I had no one. Know what happened then?" She saw herself reflected in her Dracim sister's wide eyes, but it was too late to stop. "Three years in the dungeon. That was my 'path', Sigrid."

Sigrid simply stared as the revelation crashed into her. "Three years...?" she whispered. "How? For what?"

"I needed to eat. I needed protection. Street gangs offered both." Gwenyr turned away, no longer able to look the person she'd grown up with in the eye. "You wanted to know why I'm here? My mentor told me to give forgiveness a chance. I thought maybe you'd changed."

"Everything changes, Gwenyr," Sigrid said, now almost pleading. "It's the way of the world. Accepting that is a part of life."

Gwenyr felt a final surge of fury; after all that had been said, her sister would still try to placate her with wylding nonsense. She rounded on Sigrid, eyes blazing and words striking like lightning, too fast for proper consideration. "I'm warning you, not one more word from that filthy druidic cult."

The moment the words left her mouth, Gwenyr wished she could reach out and take them back. The silence that hung between them was far worse than anything that had come before, and the hurt she'd so relished on Sigrid's face was now raw and painful. "I'm sorry," she said quickly, staring at the ground. "I didn't mean…"

"I've heard those words from so many people." Sigrid held up a hand, her tone lifeless. "I never thought I'd hear them from you." Her hand fell, and now she wrapped both arms tightly around her body. "

"You're right, though. If it's what you want, after this journey, I'll leave you be."

Sigrid turned on her heel and strode towards where Izel and Jotar still worked. The glowing spores followed her, leaving Gwenyr alone in the dark, feeling as if a great tidal wave of shame had reversed course to crash down on her. Her anger had been extinguished, replaced by raw weariness. It would be a few more minutes before there was a bright flash and a startled yelp from Rök, causing her to look up in surprise.

"It's marvellous!" Izel cried, holding his glove aloft, the dial on the back glowing with a yellow-white light. "All it needed was a sunburst spell, and…" The automaton stirred, causing Jotar to heft his hammer aloft with violence in his eyes. As she drew close, Gwenyr saw that the metal being's face had been carved into a grandfatherly figure with a long beard. The thing seemed notably devoid of claws, death beams and flame jets. In fact, with its thin arms and kindly face, it looked like its best method of attack would be a waggling finger and a stern scolding. "I thought the Keepers had all been destroyed," Izel eagerly continued. "The methods of creating them have been lost for eons. This may be the first one anyone has witnessed in over a century!"

The Keeper's almond-shaped eyes weakly flickered yellow, and it lifted its head from where it had lolled on its chest. "Informative: my functions have been restored."

Izel seemed to consider several lines of inquiry, opening his mouth and discarding each one. "Pardon me," he finally said, voice trembling with anticipation, "but are you a Keeper?"

"Informative: that is correct. Crafted by the god Dray during the Age of Illumination."

Izel clapped his hand together in sheer delight. "Oh, I've always wanted to speak to a Keeper. Um…" He pondered for a moment before snapping his fingers. "Ah, yes! Can you tell us where we are?"

The automaton straightened as if in the presence of royalty. "Informative: this is the Hall of Effigy. Lord Dray appointed me to watch over his sleeping creation, to teach his mortal servants and to maintain the minds of his Forge Soldiers."

"A machine guarding the minds of other machines," Jotar rumbled. "No doubt the reason for our cold reception."

"Or… rune-erosion?" Izel replied, casting an awkward glance at the keeper. "It's been eons, after all. I'm surprised that any techno-magic spells have lasted this long."

"Fine: a different question," Jotar conceded. "Are you able to tell us about this temple?"

"Courteous: of course," the keeper chirped. "Providing knowledge to pilgrims and true seekers is one of my primary functions. How may I be of assistance?"

Jotar cut in before Izel could speak. "Are there more Forge Soldiers? What lies beneath us? Does this temple contain hidden dangers?"

The Keeper seemed to pause, yellow eyes softly blinking. "Informative: response number one. Forge Soldiers are stationed on the upper floors. None now remain active."

"There's a relief," Izel muttered.

"Informative: response number two. Beneath us lies the most hallowed sanctum, referred to by the priests as Dray's Treasury." At those words, Izel's eyes shone almost as brightly as the Keeper's. Even Jotar raised an eyebrow in interest. "Cautionary: response number three. A great danger lies within the sanctum. Three artefacts of divine…" The Keeper stuttered, its eyes rapidly blinking as its body shuddered. "Three artefacts that… gift of… she must not…" Its head swung around to focus solely on Izel. "Exceedingly grateful: thank you." And with that, its head fell forward and its body went limp.

"Uh, that sounded important," Gwenyr commented. "Can you get it back?"

"I only had the one sunburst!" Izel replied, frantically looking from her to the Keeper. "We were heading underground! I didn't think stocking up on blinding spells would be a good idea!"

Jotar was stroking his beard, expression pensive. "Regardless, one thing is clear: this is no mere temple. Many a fool has come to ruin, meddling with 'divine artefacts'. We must be prepared for anything."

Izel hardly seemed to hear, almost seeming on the verge of tears. "This Keeper is a creation of Dray. A legend. Automaton, thinking. Left alone here to rust. Those others were just made by mortals."

The Creet paused, then his tone softened. "Then trust me, my friend. We will return for him."

It took some cajoling, but Izel reluctantly allowed himself to be steered away from the Keeper. The four travellers and sekhound were soon back in the corridor, heading towards the final spiral staircase. This time, Gwenyr purposefully hung back, allowing Sigrid to go ahead of her. It was bad enough that they were about to run into some terrible danger in the depths of this forsaken temple. Gwenyr couldn't bear the thought of her sister's wounded eyes boring into her back while they descended.

§

Jotar felt a swell of relief as they stepped off the last spiral stairway and found themselves standing in the spacious lower sanctum. The stairs had been cramped; the corridors had been cramped; even the doorways were clearly meant for smaller, nimbler beings. For their next job, he would have to insist upon a spacious cavern, or perhaps a brisk sojourn up a mountain. The moment they finished their descent, the travellers stopped dead, feeling as if a few steps had transported them to some fantastical new realm.

The carved stone walls of the temple were gone, replaced by smooth metal and gleaming surfaces. The ceiling above was crafted from the same metallic substance, the sporelights casting luminous patterns above their heads. Even here, invading vines and roots had punctured the walls, perhaps mystically empowered by the ravaging magic of the Druidic War. They crept along the polished surfaces, creating a stark contrast between the worlds of metallic divine and mundane organic.

Rök had trotted over to a nearby pile of bones, and was giving the remains a thorough sniff inspection. Some still clutched weapons in death, and more than a few were clad in stained robes bearing the hammer symbol of Dray. Not for the first time, Jotar wondered how the temple dwellers had met their end: starvation, in one final act of devotion? Or had they fought to their last against some unknown foe, an epic siege swallowed by both the earth and the ravages of time?

Lining the walls on the left and right were rows of ornately crafted metal plinths, each of them holding what seemed to Jotar like reverently placed trinkets. Bejewelled gauntlets, gleaming gold figurines, dazzlingly complex astrolabes... and looming over each was a faded tapestry, depicting a muscular Dray in the act of forging the item by his own hand.

Izel didn't seem to know where to look first, his tiny head spinning this way and that, tail quivering with excitement. Gwenyr loitered on the stairs, strangely quiet since their meeting with the Keeper, while Sigrid drifted forward, her attention clearly drawn to something beyond the plinths. Jotar tore his gaze away from the smaller trinkets and towards the great dais at the room's end, clearly intended to hold the greatest treasure of all.

Three exquisitely carved mirrors floated above the dais' surface, the outer two turned slightly inwards to create a half circle. All were taller than Jotar himself, and even he had to admit that the workmanship was captivating. Trimmed with gold and clearer than gleaming crystal, they seemed almost ethereally beautiful, although their reflections were strangely dark in the light of Sigrid's glowing spores.

Izel's gaze had finally landed on the mirrors, and he drew a white cloth from his pocket. Unfurling it in his hand, he showed the contents to his companions: three shards, each tinted a different shade of purple. "The witch left us these, and now I know why. This is where we're meant to be. I know it."

Jotar frowned down at the shards. "These were... 'gifts'? You would trust our course to the word of a mad forest witch?"

"They're creations of Dray!" Izel insisted, holding up a shard. "They demand to be made whole again. Almost like... Dray himself wants them to be fixed." He turned to Sigrid, a strange harshness to his tone. "You can feel their magic, can't you? Deeper, somehow. A power not made for mortals."

Jotar had expected a confident, lashing response – and yet, the Dracim stared, wide-eyed, between Izel and the shards, seemingly abandoned by her former confidence. "I..." Sigrid began. Her eyes flicked to Gwenyr, still half hidden in shadow at the foot of the spiral staircase. "...yes. I can't say any more, but they are powerful."

As Jotar drank in the details, the more it seemed that the mirrors had truly been crafted by divine hands. The face of a serene female was carved in gold above each one: the leftmost was barely older than a girl, the central mirror was a mature female with stunningly lifelike eyes, and the final image was that of a withered old lady, her leathery skin and stringy hair only partially concealing a great beauty.

Izel resolutely marched towards the dais, Sigrid trailing behind. Taken aback by his old friend's attitude, Jotar kept his distance as he followed them past the various sacred treasures. That Izel had hidden these strange shards was worrying enough, but the change that had come over his Tolatl and Dracim companions was far more unsettling. He stood at the foot of the steps with Rök as the other two ascended the raised platform to where the mirrors hung dark and silent. Up close, they could see that slivers of glass were missing from the corner of each.

"I don't like it either," Gwenyr said quietly, appearing at Jotar's side. "But Sigrid's mind looks like it's set."

Jotar knelt down, placing a hand on Rök's head, only to find the sekhound trembling. "It is not only your sister that worries me," he murmured back. At the mention of their familial bond, Gwenyr's eyes darted to the floor.

Izel was standing before the crone mirror on the right, tail wrapped around the matching shard and brow furrowed. "Is it this simple? Is there a proper procedure, or... oh, never mind." He took the shard in his hand and placed it into the gap at the mirror's edge. The glass surface rippled, smoothing the piece into place and finishing with an unblemished surface.

> "A sturdy youth, keen of wit and strong of arm, sought for apprenticeship at Master Thorald's forge. Kaltoran lad with four generations of experience, strong Legion or Twi-Far with fire spirit prefered. Inquire within – room, board provided."
>
> – Notice in the town of Brackenford.

Jotar tensed as smoke began to swirl in the mirror's reflection. The haze was swept aside, revealing an image of the same sanctum in which they stood, now brimming with activity. The torches crackled merrily on the walls, casting their illumination over the robed priests who moved between plinths, carefully laying new artefacts and darning tapestries.

"It's the past," Sigrid whispered. "The temple as it was."

"Mirrors that peer through time," Izel added, sounding equally awed. "This is no feat of Dray I've ever heard of."

The scenes inside the glass shifted like smoke, showing priests gathered before the dais upon which the mirrors stood. The reflections were silent, but it was clear that a debate raged; robed Tolatl, Legion, Kaltorans and more, looks of worry and frustration on their faces, trading frantic words with sharp, gesturing hands. Another swirl, and the scene became sombre. An aged Kaltoran in gold-trimmed robes stood before the mirrors, hands raised with three glass shards sitting in his palms. One by one, priests stepped forward to take the shards, raising their hoods after they had done so. When all shards had been taken, the chosen three made their way down the steps, past an honour guard on both sides formed by their fellow priests, and then vanished from sight.

Bells of warning were tolling in Jotar's mind as the images collapsed back into smoke. These Dray worshippers had broken their own mirrors, clearly the most sacred of artefacts. They would not have done so without good reason. "This is not our mission," he growled. "We should not meddle without more knowledge."

His words fell on deaf ears. Sigrid moved towards the maiden mirror on the left, the matching shard clutched in her hand. She glanced hesitantly over her shoulder, and Izel gave her a confident, almost hungry nod. Sigrid tentatively slid the fragment into place, and just like the first, the surface rippled and repaired itself as illusory smoke swirled in the depths of its reflection – only this time, it held but a single subject. It took Jotar a moment to recognise the ominous figure who stared at them from the tinted surface, eyes faintly glowing a poisonous emerald, thorned vines twisting and writhing over much of her beastly, mutated body. The Dracim in the mirror had fearsome, twisting black horns jutting high above her head like a crown, and moss grew all over her mottled skin, her thick scales giving the figure a bulky appearance. Dark green spikes jutted from gaps between these scales, and in her hand she clutched a staff topped with a single large eyeball, frantically twitching as its lidless gaze swept across the onlookers.

No one said the name, but even underneath all the foul adornments, the figure's identity was clear. Sigrid stood transfixed by her own dark reflection, one hand clasped over her mouth, eyes wide in silent horror. Gwenyr looked helplessly back and forth between her sister and her monstrous counterpart, clearly debating whether she should wrench Sigrid away from the sight.

Izel was peering at the reflection, perturbed, but failing to notice Sigrid's reaction. "Perhaps… this mirror shows the future? Or what may…"

"Shut up!" Gwenyr hissed, silencing him with a sharp shove. But the damage had been done, and whatever her monstrous future self meant to Sigrid, the Dracim woman looked utterly broken by the sight, trembling even as her eyes remained locked on the malevolent visage. Jotar knew exactly what he had seen: a wylding druid who had surrendered themselves entirely to Neph, the dread dead goddess of life, death and wylding magic.

"I'm ending this now," Gwenyr said, her voice low and dangerous. She directed her words at Izel, daring him to challenge her. "These mirrors were forged by a false god. Either we leave, or I'm breaking them."

"Agreed," Jotar said. "This has gone far enough. Give me the last shard."

He held out his hand, but Izel was frowning at the final fragment, lost in thought. "Why would Dray make such things?" he softly murmured, turning over the shard in his hand. "And only to bury them? Nothing about this seems right."

"Yes, we know," Gwenyr said, agitated. "That's why we're leaving."

Izel stared down at the shard, a look of hurt and betrayal crossing his face. "I thought these mirrors were our true mission. But I don't think they're for us."

"On that, mortal, you're spectacularly correct." Jotar, Gwenyr and Izel wheeled around at the sound of the voice, which drifted crystal clear from the sanctum's entrance. A black-cloaked figure floated down the spiral staircase, her bent pointed hat perched prominently on her grey-haired head. The newcomer reached the foot of the stairs, and now they watched the old Kaltoran witch they'd met the previous night spread out her arms in a grand gesture. "Now, at last, I come to claim what is mine."

Jotar's grip tightened on the handle of his hammer. Everything about the old Kaltoran was utterly wrong, from her casual smile to the way she drifted a foot off the ground with no apparent effort. A low growl escaped Rök's throat; a strange reversal from the sekhound's attitude the previous night. "Witch of the Valley, was it?" Jotar ventured. "You're far more than you appear."

The witch looked him up and down. "Creet. Dos' greatest mistake. And speaking of which…" She placed a hand into her billowing robes, and when it emerged, she clutched a bulky golden object that Jotar recognised as the head of the temple Keeper. "Verbose nuisance. Almost ruined our game."

Izel cried out as she tossed the Keeper's head into the air. It hit the stone floor with a clang and rolled, coming to a stop at the foot of the dais stairs.

"If you could come all this way, why have us tackle this place?" Gwenyr demanded. "What kind of witch are you?"

The elderly Kaltoran threw back her head and laughed, a long, caustic sound that rang through the chamber. Her mirth subsided with a jarring suddenness, and now her violet eyes burned with malice. As she spoke, the years seemed to melt away, the wrinkles on her hands and face tightening. "Alas, it took the rather eclectic combination of techno-magic and wyldling sorcery to accomplish the deed. Fiendish. But this fragile form has its advantages. Pulling your strings to have you clear the way, for instance." In only seconds, the withered glamour had fallen away to reveal a young Kaltoran with a freckled face, dark lips and mismatching brown and green eyes. Slowly, regally, she raised her hand to point at the mirrors. "As for why I'm here, child? Dray crafted these mirrors for me. They are mine by the highest divine right. Their powers over time will meld flawlessly with my own, and thanks to your efforts, after eons of patient searching, they are within my grasp."

"You're nothing but a mad forest witch," Izel shot back. "These mirrors don't belong to you!"

The Kaltoran theatrically rolled her eyes, bringing them to rest on Jotar. "Oh, wise Creet, truth dawning upon your face. Why don't you enlighten your companions? Unless, of course, it's something you'd rather not admit?"

'She', the Keeper had said; the one from whom these mirrors were hidden. Jotar felt a drop of sweat bead on his brow; a rare event. "I know who you would claim to be."

"Then look, and see the truth revealed."

The Creet warrior tried with all of his will not to look over his shoulder. Even for him, the act was impossible to resist. It was only a glance, but in the glass of the central motherly mirror of present truth, its true magic dulled by the missing fragment, the witch's veneer was laid bare. In her place floated a figure of deepest amethyst, naked and ghostly, her skeleton visible through translucent skin.

"You are..." Jotar said, forcing the words out through gritted teeth, "...the dark goddess of mischief, time and death. You are Nix."

The looks of shock from Izel and Gwenyr were piercing. Even Sigrid stirred, jerking out of her mirror-obsessed reverie for just a moment. The witch – the goddess Nix – raised her hands and applauded, a broad grin spreading across her wizened face, revealing a set of sparkling, strangely unblemished teeth. "Splendid. But now that the pieces are in place..." Purple smoke began to leak from the bones of the fallen scattered around the room, and suddenly the sanctum was filled with angry whispers, blending together in a fever pitch. "... it's past time for the endgame," Nix finished, bringing her hands together in one final clap.

With frightening swiftness, the smoke took solid form as wraiths. Grotesque effigies of the fallen, the ghosts shambled forward with their eye sockets gaping and empty, hefting ethereal weapons forged from the darkest magic, their sharp edges trailing purple smog. The sanctum was suddenly host to a crowd as more poured in, rising in from the vine-strewn floor and melding through the walls.

"The exit!" he barked, bringing his hammer down on the head of a lunging wraith. The foul spirit collapsed into putrid smoke that still moved of its own accord, twisting around the head of Jotar's hammer. There was an acrid stench as the stone began to rot, and it took a violent jerk for the mist to lose its hold. Jotar looked grimly from his singed hammer to the sea of enemies. Their way out was blocked by the witch – or the goddess in the witch's body – but it was their only avenue of escape. If he had to crush the head of a god, then so be it.

"Come, run the gauntlet!" Nix called, a singular flowing figure in black over a sea of undead violet. "It would be a dull contest if you simply surrendered to oblivion!"

Izel was by Jotar's side, tossing a handful of tiny metallic orbs into the oncoming horde. They flashed and crackled as they struck, creating a chain of small explosions that blasted chunks off the bodies of the wraiths. The stench that arose was almost paralysing, and they were forced up a few steps as the fog from the vanishing wraiths began to eat into the metal floor and steps. Rök snapped and barked, horns gleaming, but the hound's battle cries turned to hacking coughs as the mist advanced. Jotar was forced to scoop up his sekhound companion in one arm, swinging his hammer with the other as they slowly retreated.

"Sigrid!" Gwenyr cried, and Jotar whirled to see the Dracim sporemancer at the centre of a whirlwind. Wraiths crowded around her, but they didn't move to attack, instead merely whispering as a chorus. Through the thick barrier of ghostly bodies, Sigrid had sunk to her knees, arms clamped over her head. The monstrous image of her own future still smiled down from the leftmost mirror, almost as if it knew that it was on the verge of becoming reality.

"Wraiths can do so much more than simply break the body," Nix crooned, drifting over their heads in a relaxed pose. "Breaking the spirit is true art."

Gwenyr was desperately wrenching at the wraiths, fighting and clawing to penetrate the tight circle, but more rose from the floor of the dais by the second, adding their whispers to the throng. On Jotar's other side, Izel stood on the steps fighting like a Tolatl possessed. With one gauntleted hand he unleashed bursts of scything wind that kept the withering fog at bay; with the other, he wielded a strange cable device wrapped around one finger, a circular blade on a glowing string that carved through wraiths with smooth, whip-like strikes. Dodging and weaving, Izel fought his way to the bottom of the stairs, where he stooped to pick up the fallen head of the Keeper. Wraiths descended, their rusted ethereal weapons poised to strike. Placing Rök on the top step, Jotar flung himself down the stairs in one massive leap, crushing the heads of two in an arcing hammer blow. A ghostly foe came from the left, twin knives gleaming, too fast for Jotar to react. Rök came from nowhere with the speed of a meteor, hurtling through the air horns-first. The knife-wielding wraith instantly crumpled, and the nimble sekhound sprang to the ground with a contented woof, clearly pleased with his death-defying leap from the top step. Hammer swinging, hound barking and techno-magic wind bursts howling, the trio backed up the steps as more of the vengeful spirits surged, Izel clutching his prize with an almost religious fervour.

"You risked everything for that thing's head?!" Jotar said in disbelief.

Izel placed the Keeper's head on the top step, turning and adjusting the dials on his gauntlet. "Everything that is made carries the spirit of its creator." The gauntlet flared a brilliant orange, matching the fury and purpose burning in Izel's eyes. "Dray's soul is within this Keeper. I won't allow any further disrespect."

The air seemed to shudder as a shockwave exploded outwards from Izel's palm, and even standing behind the Tolatl, Jotar felt the searing heat. The crescent wave of citrine flame tore through the wraiths, banishing an entire swathe of enemies and even consuming the smog they left in their wake. It was impressive – but not enough to win the day.

"Oh…" Izel said, staring down in dismay at the smoking, battered gears of his gauntlet, reduced to scrap after his use of the forbidden dial. "That will not be cheap to fix."

Floating with her legs crossed as if reclining in an armchair, Nix spread her hands wide. "A marvellous show from our Tolatl techno-mage! And yet, over so soon. Your arcane trinkets truly are nothing more than pale reflections of divine power."

Izel could no longer clear the air with his wind spell. Sigrid was ensconced in despair. Gwenyr's efforts to free her sister were fruitless. Jotar's hammer could strike down many, and Rök would fight with his master to the end, but their numbers were like grains of sand on the shore. The air thickened with each fallen wraith, steadily turning their breaths to rattling, foul-tasting gasps. Jotar's hammer sizzled as the stone head was slowly eaten away, and decay coated the insides of his lungs. In a moment of cold horror, he saw that Rök's snow-white fur now bore a tint of sickly grey, more colour leeching with each passing second as the sekhound bravely stood on trembling legs at his master's side.

Even if their foes were vanquished, Jotar and his companions would wither and rot long before they ever saw the sun. Then one of Nix's taunts struck a chord, and the Creet knew what had to be done.

"Martial might won't reach her," he said, clamping a hand on Gwenyr's shoulder. "These wraiths are trying to break her spirit. That is what you must overcome."

The young Twin Blood ceased her desperate fight against the shroud of wraiths surrounding Sigrid, turning to Jotar with her brow coated in sweat. "What…?"

"This much I know: the All-Being is not a god of anger. He blesses those who forgive, and seeks to mend past ills."

Gwenyr could have argued. She could have scoffed at a Creet for claiming to know such things, or rejected his words as saccharine babbling. But from the look that passed across her face, Jotar understood that the words he spoke were not his own, and that he hadn't told Gwenyr anything she hadn't already pondered in the depths of her soul. This was only a reminder, at a time when it was needed.

Gwenyr swallowed, focusing upon the huddled form of her sister beyond the thick mass of whispering wraiths. She tightly closed her eyes and calmed her breathing. By now, the fresh crop of Nix's servants had made it to the foot of the dais stairs, and Jotar was forced to meet them head on, swinging and crushing, each hammer blow dispelling a wraith to acrid mist, where two more would take its place. Ghostly weapons lashed out, spreading burning rot where they struck. Rök yelped in pain as a decaying spear point caught one of his back legs, forcing him limping back to the protection of his master. Izel stood a few steps up, lashing out with his cable saw, but already the glow from the weapon ebbed.

A new light shone from behind, and Jotar looked to see Gwenyr's body softly shimmering with a light that wove around her limbs like liquid gold. Her eyes snapped open, and with dissonant tranquillity, she began to simply walk forward. Gwenyr's unflinching stride pierced the solid wall of wraiths that menaced her sister, and they screamed in frustration as they attacked, only to have their weapons twist and burn to nothing. In only a moment, Gwenyr was at their very centre, turning Sigrid away from her mirror reflection and pulling her into a powerful embrace.

"That will never be you," Gwenyr said softly, although her voice carried clear and strong. "Because your sister will never let that happen. I promise."

The smooth light flowed outwards and intertwined with Sigrid's body, and for a moment, the two sisters stood in a whirlwind of gold that caused even the wraiths on the dais steps to shrink back. Sigrid slowly raised her hands, returning Gwenyr's embrace. Its work complete, the light slowly faded.

"I'm going to be quite ill," Nix groaned, hanging upside down with an expression of boredom. "Mortals are so disgustingly squishy. Inside and out."

There was a sharp snap as Sigrid's stave leapt into her hand. The Dracim sporemancer turned to the possessed Kaltoran witch, the tears in her eyes doing nothing to dampen their rage and resolve. "You'll pay for what you've done. Starting with the life of the young witch you've stolen."

The vines snaking across the walls of the room lashed out, ensnaring the young Kaltoran and wrapping around her body with a swift ferocity. Her violet eyes burned with power as she struggled, but with the air forced from her lungs, she could only hack and gasp.

Sigrid's eyes gleamed with purpose as she drew her fist in tighter. "You were right about one thing, oh great goddess of mischief. Mortals are so squishy." The Dracim's spores swirled around her as she commanded her plants to choke all consciousness from the possessed witch.

The witch screamed as even more vines joined the throng and curling around their target in an inescapable embrace, not with her voice, but a cry that echoed through the minds of all. "Undone!" the voice wailed. "Defeated am I! Brought low by the tenacity of mortals! Woe! WOE!" Shattered shards of violet glass hurtled outwards, and the witch went limp as the true form of Nix tumbled from her body. For a moment, the translucent goddess listlessly drifted, eyes blank. Then she righted herself, folding her arms and flashing the group a placid smile. "Well, that was amusing."

Sigrid commanded her vines to pull the young Kaltoran's body towards them, even as she called out to the life creeping sanctum, summoning spore creatures that immediately set upon the nearest wraiths. Nix made no move to stop her: now revealed, her true form was an amethyst beacon of pulsating power, long white hair flowing like that of an underwater corpse, her beauty both captivating and monstrous. The goddess began lazily swirling her hand as if she held a goblet of wine, and as her hand completed the first arc, a crescent wave of violet power cascaded across their assembled group, seeming to rip apart the fabric of time itself.

Jotar's hammer was now an unwieldy lump in his tiny hands. He was a boy again, skinny and weak, his beard vastly shortened, arms thin, devoid of crystal and clasped in the shackles of slavery. From the corners of his vision, he saw his allies transformed: Sigrid and Gwenyr, frightened girls with stubs for horns and wearing rough-spun peasant smocks; Izel, a terrified child in grandiose noble finery; Rök reduced to the ball of white fluff he'd been as a pup. Before the shock could sink in, Nix swirled her hand again, and that terrible, inexorable time was sweeping over them once more. Now Jotar felt his skin withering, strength vanishing from his limbs as his flesh was almost completely consumed by green crystal. The same happened to his companions, time ravaging them in an instant, until they were no more than corpses who'd yet to lie down and accept their fate.

Nix made one final sweeping gesture, presiding over her summoned army. "You play the game well, wild cards and all. But my powers exist in realms beyond your understanding… and I've waited long enough to claim what's rightfully mine."

"Because it's all about you, Nix."

The presence appeared with such suddenness that for one wild second, Jotar believed he must have simply missed it every other time he'd looked upwards. Light flooded the sanctum, and Izel yelped in surprise as a gigantic hand reached down to gently lift the Keeper's head from where the Tolatl had been standing guard over it.

"You have the heart of a true craftsman," said Dray, god of passion and crafting. "As a matter of fact, that's what brought me here." The deity placed the golden head back into Izel's hands. "My sincerest thanks, young Tolatl, for your efforts to protect my Keeper."

Izel didn't respond, apparently too preoccupied with trying not to pass out in shock. Dray stood ten feet tall, his body softly flickering with white flame and lustrous hair fanned out by ethereal wind. He wore little more than a silken sash fastened with ornate metal clasps, leaving most of his impressive body on display. He reached for a device on his wrist – a dizzyingly intricate mass of dials and translucent spheres – and swept a finger across its surface. Nix's enchantment shattered in an instant, the fragments of temporal magic forcibly drawn into Dray's contraption, leaving the mortals blinking in surprise and relief as they were restored to their true ages.

Dray smirked, sweeping his gaze over Sigrid, lingering on Jotar, and then his focus came to rest on Nix. The forge god raised a hand and snapped his fingers, sending a fiery shockwave cascading across the army of wraiths. When it had finished its course, the chamber was empty aside from wisps and vapour. "Now… about these mirrors. As their creator, they were always mine to gift to whomever I chose."

"They were gifts for ME!" Nix hissed, the veins in her translucent skin pulsing with indignation. "Not for that cosmic wench who wheedled her way into your affections!"

"I did make the mirrors for us," Dray murmured, glancing wistfully over his shoulder. "Once, long ago, I imagined the two of us crafting history as we wished. Centuries passed before I came to realise… the idea of 'us' never darkened your dreams, Nix. Only what you could claim for yourself, using honeyed words and poisonous half-truths." He turned back to the goddess, eyes glinting with a resolution that spanned eons. "I found true love and respect with another: one who broke the chains of lust that bound my soul, and revealed to me the lies of a future that could never be."

"And yet, you commanded your servants to preserve my gift." Nix's voice had dropped to a sultry, carrying whisper. "Even if the mirrors were hidden beyond my reach. To leave their purpose unfulfilled…"

Dray shook his head, releasing wisps of flame from his lustrous hair. "Quite right. I thought perhaps, in time, I could alter them for good. But… well, my unfinished projects could fill all the caves in all the world. You know how it is." He turned to the four mortals far below him. "If you would do me one last act? Even some of the most magnificent creations were never meant to be. These mirrors must end."

Flowing gold flared to life around Gwenyr's body. "With pleasure."

"No!" Nix screeched, soaring forward, her face twisted with nightmarish rage. Dray soared forth to meet her in the air, a glimmering shadow swirling behind him like a living cloak. Divine magic collided in a display that probably would have been very impressive if Jotar had been looking in their direction. Instead, he was charging towards the central mirror, hammer raised to strike. The entire structure crumbled beneath his mighty blow, the flawless glasswork reduced to shards and the ornate metal frame crumpling as it clattered to the stone floor of the dais. On his right, Gwenyr shattered the crone mirror with one crushing blow. On his left, Sigrid commanded her spore creatures to drag the mirror to the floor, where their unfeeling fingers viciously tore it to pieces.

Izel watched in silence as the deed was done. He turned back to Dray, and as Jotar hefted his hammer over his shoulder, he saw that the godly duel had descended into a battle of jibes.

“Meddler!” Nix accused, pointing a sharp finger in her enemy’s direction. “I roamed Akharon for decades retrieving those shards from your peons. How typical of you to ruin a perfectly good game!”

Dray made a derisive snort. He clutched a deep gash on his shoulder, from which poured forth gleaming, milky white blood, but the god still smiled. “Your sense of fun is utterly twisted,” he scoffed. “How can a game be fun if there are no rules?”

“This again? I thought you understood, once.”

“And I thought you were irresistible, once. Perhaps we’re even.”

Like a candle flame consuming a piece of parchment, the two gods began to vanish mid-argument, their bodies turning to dust. The dust held their shapes for a moment before scattering, and as the glow of their divine forms faded, the sanctum fell back into soft spore-light. The sounds of their quarrel lingered for only a moment before that, too, was replaced by silence.

“Gods,” Jotar wearily repeated. There were no arguments from his comrades.

* * *

Perhaps by some miracle from Dray, the temple’s doors lay wide open as they reached the entrance chamber. Sunlight streamed through the circular opening, and Rök wasted no time bounding up the slope on his newly healed leg, running in mad circles to celebrate the green grass beneath his paws once more. Nearby, their pack elk grazed on the valley’s grass, pausing only to cast the group a glance before going back to munching.

“Does that qualify as a job completed?” Gwenyr asked, the first time anyone had spoken in a long while. She pulled down her hood, gazing thoughtfully down at the temple’s entrance. “The enemies are gone. Even the doors are open.”

“We did destroy sacred artefacts crafted by Dray,” Izel pointed out, swallowing before forcing himself to add: “even if… Dray himself told us to do it.”

“What the Lord doesn’t know won’t hurt him,” Sigrid said, leading their elk back towards them with a glint in her eye. “And incidentally, what a terrible shame that those sacred mirrors were smashed when we got there.”

Gwenyr laughed, a clear ringing sound that seemed to fill the valley. “Ah, the old ‘it was like that when I got there’ excuse.”

Jotar carried the young unconscious Kaltoran witch in his arms, the colour returning to her face as she took slow, steady breaths. “Perhaps our route home doesn’t have to be quite so direct?” he suggested. “This witch has been through an ordeal, and is in need of extended care. And your new friend…” He nodded down at the keeper’s head, which jutted from Izel’s bag. It had been the only piece of the keeper that Nix hadn’t torn to pieces during her descent. “Perhaps there’s a temple to Dray where he can be mended.”

“You’re saying you want to stay as a group?” Sigrid asked, giving Jotar a light punch to his crystalline arm with a sly grin. “I knew you cared.”

Gwenyr met her sister’s eyes, and a moment of understanding passed between them. “No objections from me,” the young All-Monk declared. “We could even pick up a few local jobs along the way.”

Izel made a show of thinking about the proposal before patting his satchel, bulging from both the keeper’s head and temple spoils. “I’ve got artefacts to examine, tools that need fixing, and a sacred Keeper to restore to his former glory. Shall we take a more… ambling route back to the city?”

This time, as they made their way back up the gentle slopes of the valley, there was a good deal more lively conversation. Wounds had been opened, old and new, and perhaps these would still take time to heal. But time was now on their side as the Tolatl, Creet, Dracim and Twin Blood – plus one excited sekhound – set out upon their next journey.

> They sat on the hill, watching the lights of the city below. “Do you think it will last?” Aldric asked, his voice gentle but deep, full of uncertainty.
>
> Heinrich smirked. “Kingdoms die like old trees – slow cracks, sudden falls. Ours is no different. Too many people groups, too many ambitious nobles, too many enemies, and a dying king. It’s already splintering at the edges.”
>
> Aldric frowned. “But it’s endured so much, and our king is a literal demigod. It feels eternal.”
>
> Heinrich’s gaze turned distant, eyes reflecting the far-off horizon. “So does every moment, right up until the very instant that it is not.”

History

The wind whispered through the crumbling arches, carrying the scent of leaves and damp stone. Sir Selena ran a gloved hand along the weathered wall, feeling the grooves left by centuries of rain, war and time itself.

"This place was once a jewel," she murmured.

Her companions moved ahead, their voices loud and excited. Here, beneath tangled vines and shattered towers, echoes of the great Druidic War lingered. The citadel had housed kings and stood since a time when gods walked the earth, and now lay surrendered to the forest.

She scaled a fallen pillar, vast as a house, its carvings worn to obscurity. How many slaves had died lifting it up? Had a lone druid or great beast toppled it?

Selena thought of the nameless soldiers who had bled into these stones, of proud priests calling out desperate prayers and offering sacrifices in the high chambers. She thought of rulers who had once believed this fortress eternal. Their empire eternal. Civilisation eternal.

Now, wildflowers bloomed where banners had flown. New nations rose atop the ruins of old, and civilisation reborn from those final sparks that the druids failed to extinguish.

Her fingers traced the pommel of her sword. One day, her own blade would rust. Her own name faded like those before her. Yet, for now, she walked through history, another figure passing through time's great ruin.

"Selena," called a voice.

She turned, exhaling. The past lay still. The present moved forward.

She followed.

Age of Creation

The great creator god Mon moves on from creating other worlds and pantheons to create the world of Akharon.

Mon creates the Eternal gods and together they populate Akharon.

Mon creates the twin sun gods Akh and Ath before turning to dust.

The powerful goddess of nature Neph decrees there will be no further creation on Akharon.

Age of Darkness

2,000+ years

Evil god Dos secretly arrives on Akharon from a distant world looking for Mon.

Akh and Ath secretly create the Tolatl and Legion.

Dos secretly creates the firstborn Creet using crystals from his home world.

Neph discovers that Tolatl and Legion have created civilisation.

Neph attacks Akh, Ath and tries to kill their creations. The god of magic Pol defends them and is killed by Neph.

The gods cut off Neph's right arm and drive her back.

Pol's body and Neph's spear Ire fall to Akharon.

The gods walk Akharon to guide civilisation directly. They oversee the creation of the city Catla.

Five of the goddess Fik's servants become Wielders, taking over Pol's duties.

The city of Catal is destroyed as the gods Akh and Corp argue.

The Twi-Far hero Faren Drasong strikes the gods for their malfeasance; killing a Wielder of Pol and maiming Ugra'Thok.

The gods accept they have done a poor job stewarding mortals and depart Akharon for the heavens.

Many Twi-Far flee to the distant islands of Fari and Eyna.

Empire of Catla conquerors the continent of Catlan.

Dos creates the Jinn to enslave the Twi-Far of the Blood Stone Desert.

Refugees flee to the holy city of Stronghold.

Archdruid visited by Neph and disappears - abandoning his army.

Dragons awaken accross Akharon due to the scent of wylding from the Druidic War.

Neph corrupts the valley of Pol's Rest near Stronghold.

The dragon king Languorem attacks Pol's Rest.

Languorem creates the Dracim to work and fight as his slaves.

Languorem seizes Stronghold.

Kingdom of Catla formed from the ashes of the Empire of Catla that fell to the Archdruid.

Giants invade Holy Kingdom of Catla from the west.

The elemental king Zowilza arises in the Morass Mountains.

The goddess Ath visits southern Legion tribes.

Southern Legion civil war. Blood Horn tribe seize control.

House Catla seize control of the Kingdom of Catla.

Twi-Far overthrow the Jinn and become the Drasong Clan.

Catla's Golden Army goes west over the ocean, never to be seen again.

Archdruid turns to Neph and becomes a demigod.

Archdruid lauches the Druidic War and destroys the Empire of Catla.

Neph confronts Dray and is killed by Fik.

Neph's body falls to Akharon.

Twins goddesses Nijin and Jinin born from Neph's blood.

Catla expedition and Archdruid locate Neph's head. The expedition is destroyed.

Neph's spear Ire recovered by Hercule Noskos.

Kingdom of Catla falls into civil war.

Akh ends the war by attacking between the armies.

Nation splits in two, becoming the Kingdom of Ire and Holy Kingdom of Catla.

Time of Struggle

126 years

Age of Illumination

600+ years

Age of Gods

74 years

Creation

The planet Akharon is a world of many religions and cultures, each with their own creation myths.

All-Faith

Before time there was only the void, an endless expanse of empty darkness that stretched beyond measure. The light of the All-Being pierced the mire with a radiance so pure and true that it shook the fabric of existence into being.

As the light grew, the void trembled and from its depths new worlds began to take shape. First came the stars, glimmering points of lesser light that danced and twirled in the darkness. Then came the planets, spinning and whirling in their endless orbits.

At the heart of the cosmos there was the great castle Sol, a fortress of light and majesty that was a glorious beacon in the black. The All-Being spoke and the castle was surrounded with life both great and small, and all knew that they were loved.

Eternal Priesthood

The great god Mon has always existed and had created innumerable worlds and pantheons of gods to watch over them. The goddess Neph was the firstborn of Akharon's divine caretakers, and through her and other deities the world was populated with life and made unfathomably beautiful.

For a time it was good, as the Eternal gods enjoyed the company and guidance of their father. Though with the creation of the twin sun gods Akh and Ath, Mon faded into dust as the last of his power was spent.

The world was a primal place, filled with violence, great beasts and devoid of civilisation. Akh and Ath longed to create as their father and siblings had, but Neph stayed their hands as she deemed Akharon complete and perfect.

Traditional Ta'Di

In the beginning, there was Ogonjo, the great snail who floated through the expanse of space with the shell Akharon on her back. The world was a curious place, full of life and wonder, but Ogonjo was too busy munching on the cosmic lettuce to pay it much attention.

As Ogonjo chewed her way through the universe, creatures of all shapes and sizes sprang up on the surface of her shell, living in harmony with the snail and the cosmic leafy greens that sustained her. So it went on for eons, with Ogonjo wandering through the void, the world on her back growing and changing with each passing moment. Though no one knew where Ogonjo was going or what lay ahead, they all knew that as long as they had the great spirit snail they would always have a home.

All following history is from the point of view of the Eternal Priesthood, as it is the dominant cultural perspective.

Age of Darkness

"Akharon exists as our father made it. Let it remain unchanged and in its state of flawless natural harmony for all eternity. Let it stand as a beacon of perfection in our vast universe. A monument to the life and death of our beloved father."

– Goddess Neph,
following the death of Mon.

After the creation of the twin sun gods Akh and Ath, and the death of Mon, the world of Akharon entered what modern priests would label the Age of Darkness (and worshipers of Neph would call the Age of Harmony). A time of primordial conflict, where monsters and the intelligent species struggled against one another for survival. A world of constant contest, where only the strongest and most adaptable of the mighty beasts thrived.

Untouched by civilisation, Akharon's towering mountains, dense forests and endless plains stretched to all horizons in a tapestry of green, yellow and brown. The rhythm of life was dictated by the rising and setting of the suns, the movement of herds and the changing of seasons. There were no roads, no cities, no buildings of any kind – just the raw beauty and danger of the natural world, unchanged for over two thousand years.

Arrival of Dos

» See Dos write-up on pg: 184.

Before Akharon, Mon had created countless planets, each with its own pantheon of deities. The malevolent god Dos originated from one of these unknown worlds, and long ago set about to follow his creator across the vast void between suns.

As Dos secretly slinked into Akharon, a dark, foreboding aura swept across the planet as he walked this new world for the first time. It would be centuries before the other gods would learn of his presence, and even longer before they took notice of his creation of the Creet (pg: 8) and Demons.

Akh & Ath Create

» See Akh write-up on pg: 179.
» See Ath write-up on pg: 182.

The twin gods of fire and light grew restless as they longed to create as their father and siblings had. Defying their eldest sister Neph, they secretly went down to Akharon and fashioned the Tolatl and Legion in their own likeness. These two species would have gone unnoticed by the detached Eternal gods if it were not for their development of civilisation.

They learned to cooperate, communicate and make use of simple tools. They built settlements and traded between tribes to expand their resources. For the first time in Akharon's history, the intelligent species were dominating the monsters and taming the land with farms and buildings. They were making use of the power of the gods, the power to create... and Neph would not stand for such blasphemy.

Murder of Pol

"If any doubt the existence of the Eternal gods, let them travel to within sight of the great city of Stronghold and gaze upon the massive metal arm of Pol with their own eyes. Have them feel the weight of his great sacrifice."

– Tlaloc Kethwol,
Eternal priest.

Enraged by the actions of the twins Akh and Ath in the creation of the Tolatl and Legion, Neph sought to banish her siblings to the void and restore the world through force to its primal state. Taking up her great spear Ire, she moved towards Akharon but was stopped by her brother Pol; the metal god of magic and knowledge.

Pol argued with Neph on behalf of the twins – that they had only sought to follow in the very nature of their father who had created right up until the point of his death. Tragically, Pol's words only succeeded in angering Neph further, and she struck her sibling down, killing him in a fit of rage.

Pol's great body plummeted to Akharon, creating the valley of Pol's Rest and the plateau where the city of Stronghold would one day be built around his great metal arm.

The gods were horrified by the death of Pol; never had they experienced such pain. They attacked Neph, cutting off her right arm and forced her to retreat. Losing her spear Ire, Neph no longer had the power to dominate the other deities, but they dared not attempt to finish her off as they feared losing another of their kin.

* * *

Separating herself from the other gods, Neph circled Akharon – a visible green flicker of light that could be seen even during the day – and sent down a magical substance known as wylding to corrupt and twist both plants and animals into monsters while she sought her divine spear. Neph was still the most powerful of the gods, and she was a patient hunter who would take her time to study and test her foes both mortal and divine.

Pol was most beloved by Dray, who wept bitterly at the death of his dearest friend. Though Dray romantically pursued the elusive goddess Nix at the time, the silent goddess Fik admired him and gave five of her greatest Archon servants up to be stewards of Pol's arcane responsibilities for Dray's sake. They would come to be known as the five Arcane Wielders and would often work alongside Dray to carry out Pol's divine duties.

In the following years, Dray developed a passion for craftsmanship and metal. He forged weapons for most of the gods, and along with Akh they prompted others to travel down with them to Akharon to steward its fledgling nations. The gods in their natural form are gigantic entities, but Nix taught them to take on the likeness of mortals and animals so that they may walk the earth and mingle with its people.

Eternal Gods

Akh	– Civilisation, air (weather), family, language & yellow sun. – Married to Corp. – Sword, halberd.
Ath	– Wisdom, war (courage, tactics), loyalty, sacrifice, self-control, birds & red sun. – Axe, mace, shield.
Corp	– Commerce, luck, water (ships, travel), hounds & moon. – Married to Akh. – Dagger.
Dos	– Sorrow (cause & relief), war (fear, chaos), unruly children, curses, nightmares & cats. – Glaive, twin axes, Enchantment (mind).
Dray	– Craftmanship/skill, passion (romance, friendship & work), stone & metal. – Married to Fik. – Hammer, crossbow.
Etso	– Festivities, music, ale, madness, genius, peace & rainbows.
Fik	– Cosmos (stars), dreams, destiny/fate & silence. – Married to Dray. – Large scissors.
Jinin	– Death/life, hunting (bows, tracking, traps), monsters (large), animals & harvest. – Bow.
Jop Jop	– Justice, vengance, ethereals spirits & earthquakes. – Club.
Neph	– Life, death, nature & magic (wylding). – Dead: replaced by Jinin & Nijin. – Spear.
Nijin	– Life/death, fertility, monsters (small), plants & planting. – Staff.
Nix	– Mischief, afterlife, beauty/art, time, magic (enchantment), fey, wraiths & mirrors. – Enchantment.
Pol	– Magic (techno-magic & alchemy), metal, knowledge. – Dead and replaced by Dray (metal) and the Arcane Wielders: (Pri (runes), Sec (gestures), Ter (potions), Qua-Novus (binding) & Qui (artefacts).
Ugra'thok	– Consumption, food, giants, insects & strength. – Maimed. – Maw, flail.

Age of Illumination

"Is Akh the king of the gods? We mortals tend to say yes, but the other gods do not agree. Especially his wife Corp."

– Xochitl Boinis,
Merchant priestess of Corp.

The dawn of the Age of Illumination was a time of many legends and mythic deeds. Gods walked the earth with mortals, mighty sandal-clad heroes embarked on fated quests across oceans and demigods slew great monsters through cunning.

Despite their divinity, the gods showed themselves to be as morally flawed as any mortal, but with far greater consequences due to their power and unaccountability. They regularly entangled themselves in competitions of ego, cavorted with beautiful people who were married or betrothed, worked hundreds to death in the creation of great monuments and battled against one another with armies of thousands over the pettiest of disputes.

City of Catal

» See House Catla write-up from pg: 108.

The height of this time was the creation of the city of Catal, a mythic beacon of civilisation where gods lived side-by-side with mortals and taught them to use magic. No one knows where this city was located, as it was drowned beneath the sea after Akh discovered his wife Corp in the bed of yet another handsome suitor. Their fight created a massive storm and was only stopped after Etso and Jop Jop separated them long enough for their emotions to calm.

The city may be lost, but its name lives on in the most notable of noble houses and Akharon's largest continent. Artist renditions of Catal depict it with columned buildings, grape vines and cobblestone roads lined by metal and marble statues of the gods.

Death of a Wielder & Departure

» See Twi-Far write-up from pg: 32.

Not long after the flooding of Catal the Twi-Far rebel Faren Drasong sought vengeance on the gods for their many vices and for not allowing mortals to self-govern. He gathered together a force of brave warriors and conspired with Ugra'thok to steal Jop Jop's club to strike down Akh and take his divine power. Faren did not manage to reach Akh before notice, and in the ensuing fight, he killed an Arcane Wielder or Pol (Qua, master of binding) and broke Ugra'thok's legs with the club of Jop Jop.

Ugra'thok had planned to betray Faren, but all were deceived by Neph who (disguising herself as a helpful spider) led the Twi-Far to Jop Jop's club and ensnared their enemies during combat.

The gods saw that they were failing as caretakers, creating enemies among the mortals and exposing themselves to Neph's vengeance. They abandoned the crippled Ugra'thok as a traitor and returned to the heavens to guide with a softer touch.

Empire of Catla

» See Kingdom of Ire write-up from pg: 82.
» See Holy Kingdom of Catla write-up from pg: 102.

"The Empire of Catla was a marvel of inter-species achievement, a vast and powerful civilisation that spread its influence far and wide. From the grandeur of its architecture to the discipline of its soldiers, Catla was a testament to the potential of mortal endeavours.

Yet, for all its glories, it was a flawed and imperfect society, plagued by corruption and greed. In the end, it was the very virtues that had made the Empire great – its ambition and love of order – that proved to be its downfall."

– Rufaro Kufunda,
All-Monk historian.

Continental Conquest

The large continent of Catlan (which was a single land mass at the time, and not split into Catlan and the Whispering) was home to many nations, but the greatest of these was the large Kingdom of Catla in the south by the Gale Sea. Their Tolatl ruler, King Etalpalli the 6th, was an ambitious tyrant who desired to spread 'civilisation' to all lands and people.

It would be almost two centuries before the completion of his great work to unite Catlan under a single crown. But even at its peak, the Empire would not succeed in taming the southern tundras, the furthest northern jungles or the vast Blood Stone Desert.

Early & Eastern War

The Kingdom of Catla was quick to form an alliance with their neighbouring Legion Kingdom of Burdragon. They were famous for their armoured raptor-riding knights and quickly became the elite military arm of House Catla.

After a short war (and some well-targeted assassinations) the Kaltoran Kingdom of Valdis was also brought into the fold, as many of their nobles were keen to end their ceaseless conflicts with Burdragon and shift focus to less militaristic nations. Valdis was responsible for conquering the smaller nations to the east of the Blood Stone Desert. The kingdoms of Panos, Sigimund and Tarquinius were secured through war, while House Romanos was sliced off from the Southern Legion Tribes through political manoeuvring.

Northern War

The wild northern lands of Catlan were home to many diverse people, such as the cultured Apollonios, and the tribes of Rubis who were enslaved to dark spirits.

While many northern nations fell to the martial power of Catla and Burdragon, it was the betrayal of House Lagos against their fellow northern kin that was their final downfall. House Lagos is defined to this day by their political cunning and skill at courtly intrigue.

Final Island War

The pirates of the eastern Kraken isles were the final nations to come under the banner of the Empire of Catla. The most resolute were the Salt Kings and Queens of House Daskraken, whose ships and skilled sailors could hold back any army that attempted to cross their seas.

An opportunity presented itself when the Salt King Chirango Daskraken was forced off his land by his sisters. He took his army south and stole the lands of Atta from the Kingdom of Tarquinius. The armies of the mainland nations gathered to repel the outcast Salt King. Facing death, Chirango betrayed his homeland and used his ships to secretly transport the armies of the Empire to the Kraken islands.

Cultural Assimilation

» See Eternal Priesthood write-up from pg: 176.

Those at the cultural heights of the Kingdom of Catla were engineers, politicians and system creators. Their developments in civil and military organisation were more advanced than those of the other nations, and they were often the first to invent new alchemical and techno-magic arcane processes. As the armies of their empire spread out across the vast continent of Catlan they assimilated the distinctiveness of the other nations, bringing the most potent portions back to their capital city of Celestis.

The isolated Kingdom of Apollonios had developed an intricate religious structure with many great works of art and theatre. Within a single generation, they transformed the simplistic spiritual outlooks of House Catla into what is now seen as the Eternal Priesthood. Within just two generations this became the official faith of the Empire and the war to unite Catlan became a holy war, for both current conflicts and retroactively for battles long finished.

Concepts of chivalric honour, family and law were heavily inspired by the Chevalier lords of Valdis, who were able to form friendships and bonds with even those they had conquered. Food was imported from the fertile lands of the north, and ship-building techniques were refined by the carpenters and sailors of the eastern coast and Kraken isle.

Despite these many cultural advancements, the Empire of Catla remained a brutal and corrupt place. Slavery was rampant, minor crimes by the lower classes often resulted in execution, arristocrats were above the law, Tolatl were treated as superior, and those who remained outside the Eternal faith were driven out.

> “Justice is the sacred gift of Jop Jop; woe to the lord who withholds it from his people.”
>
> – Duke Solomon Lowiking.

Outcasts

» See All-Faith write-up from pg: 174.

Those most heavily persecuted by the Empire were the peaceful monks of the All-Faith. They could not be cowed by threats, were gaining many followers among the slaves and held the dangerous perspective that there was just one god and that all people were of equal value to him. Worshipers of the gods Neph and Dos were also looked down upon, and were required to pay religious taxes for drawing the attention of these evil deities. Adherents to Ta'Di spiritual teachings were frowned upon, but they suffered only minor discrimination as many Ta'Di practitioners acknowledged the Eternal gods and were protected by Kaltoran lords who reformed the religion.

Outlaws and those suffering persecution often ended up in the Whispering Jungle to the far north. The harshness of those lands and its many monsters sent some wild, while others were able to etch out simplistic lives in hiding. Some joined with the numerous druidic cults of the region, giving their lives over to Neph and forsaking all ties to civilisation.

A community of All-Faith adherents formed along the northern border of the Kingdom of Rubis and the Whispering Jungle. They were not allowed to enter the Empire proper but were permitted to exist as their All-Monk warriors acted as a thin wall against the jungle's many threats. House Rubis came to regret their tolerance, as from this community would come the Archdruid, the one who would end the Empire of Catla.

Golden Army goes West

» See Giants of Tilwards write-up from pg: 160.

Many years after the formation of the Empire its decadent rulers were struggling with social unrest and aspired to capture the glory that their ancestors enjoyed. They built a grand army and ten thousand warships along their western coast to sail out to new lands. This was known as the Golden Army, for the prow of each ship was adorned with glittering metal and symbols to Akh and Ath. Their mission was to explore and conquer new lands.

This grand army would not return to the Empire as they encountered the giants of Mammon and their insatiable god Ugra'thok. Some would travel on to the Twi-Far lands of Fari and Eyna, but most were killed or scattered to isolated shores by the giants.

Over the coming century, a few giants would land on the shores of Catlan, but they would not find the prosperous and burgeoning Empire that their golden foes had described. The entire Empire had been destroyed by the Archdruid and Neph-worshiping druids. They had replaced its fields with endless forests of trees, its castles had been laid waste by wylding-infused monsters, and the continent of Catlan itself had been sundered in two. Unable to contend with the Archdruid's great beasts, the giants focused their attention on the great island of Tilward.

Time of Struggle

"Life is a road of numerous forks, and history a map to where those paths lead."

– Duke Adamis Fordis.

This period of time is marked by monumental changes in Akharon's people and the planet itself, and it was all triggered by the rise to power of a single figure in the remote northern Whispering Jungles of the Catlan: the infamous Archdruid.

Druidic War

» See All-Faith write-up from pg: 174.

"It is not sufficient to simply remove the plague of civilisation. It must be replaced with the grandeur of nature lest a greater evil return to take its place."

– Archdruid.

The monks of the All-Being escaped the persecution of the Empire by settling along the edge of the Whispering Jungle on the northern edge of the continent. There they lived peaceful lives tending to their temples, gardens, herds, crafts and families. Among these monks was a Remnant acolyte destined to change the entire world as much as any god. His true name has been long forgotten, expunged from all records by the All-Monks as a heretic.

The followers of the All-Faith believe that the All-Being is the one true god and creator, and that no other god exists. They have a prophecy recorded in their sacred texts that speak of a great and powerful messenger. An All-Prophet that would rise to lead them in a great battle against the forces of evil.

Many thought that an unnamed acolyte was this prophet. His community was quick to grasp onto every sign that might validate this perspective, so much so that the young Remnant believed it himself. He poured himself into his studies, eager to prove that he was indeed the All-Prophet who would bring justice for his people. He burned with a desire to gain the power that would come with this title, and to punish the Empire for its tyranny. He devoted his life to exploring sacred texts and readying his soul to receive the All-Power magic and blessing of the All-Being. But an idea began to tug at his mind where a seed of corruption found fertile soil.

A New Theology

The sacred texts made little mention of the other gods of Eternity, but did talk of Neph who was seen as the antithesis of the All-Being. She was not a god herself, but a powerful enemy that had once waged a great war among the stars. The acolyte became convinced that there was more to the story.

This theological discordance came to a head when the acolyte discovered what he believed to be a lost sacred text: the Book of Midnight. This text asked questions of his faith and put Neph on a pedestal. It claimed that Neph battled a great evil to return Akharon to a state of perfect natural harmony.

The mainstream sacred texts talk of a great war, and that the All-Being pulled Remnant back from death itself to be the seed of a new divine kingdom. This Book of Midnight claimed this was a mistranslation, that the All-Being is Neph, and it was Neph who pulled the Remnant back from death for the holy role of healing the world.

The young Remnant acolyte spent months locked inside a meditation chamber with his most trusted followers standing guard. When he finally emerged he gathered together his inner circle and shared his grand revelation: Neph was the All-Being, and it was the job of the All-Being's followers to wage her war against civilisation so that Akharon could be restored.

Gathering Storm

The All-Monks of his community rejected this new teaching and were saddened by their pupil's misguided ideals. They had expected much from him, but those dreams were now dashed. The monks exiled this Remnant from their temples, and he and his disciples were forced to flee deeper into the Whispering Jungle.

In the depths of the wild they met many outcasts who were druids and worshipers of Neph. This rejected acolyte became one of them, and came to lead them due to his ability to master all that he put his mind to. The druids shared with him the secrets of wylding: a magical substance that was a gift from Neph that could be harvested from magical trees and monsters from within the jungle.

During this time he abandoned his given name and no longer thought of himself as an All-Monk acolyte. He cast off his identity as a snake casts off its skin, ready to grow and mature. He arose the Archdruid and was filled with a burning sense of purpose.

The Archdruid's agents travelled across the Whispering Jungle, gathering druidic cults, criminals, wildmen and great monsters to his cause. He used eloquent speeches, displays of power and promises of vengeance against the Empire to bind them to his great plan. Those who would not come willingly – such as the Verdant Creet and many powerful Neph Spawn fiends – were enslaved to the Archdruid by wylding magic. Even corpses were bent to the indomitable will of the Archdruid, as they were filled with wylding spores to be transformed into fungizombies to shamble forward as mindless hordes of terror.

> "We cannot grasp how close civilisation came to death. If the Archdruid had travelled but one more week or given the order to siege Stronghold..."
>
> – Duc Olivier Valdis.

Fall of an Empire

The vast Empire of Catla was woefully unprepared for the Archdruid's armies. A skittering, shambling, pulsating and angry swarm of monsters and men overwhelmed its defenders. Its grand cities were razed to the ground, along with its farms, fortresses and roads. All were to be replaced by wylding-fueled nature; living monuments to Neph.

So potent were the powers of the Archdruid and his followers that they were able to tear the world asunder, creating new mountains, rivers and canyons. Even splitting the continent of Catlan in two to break a resolute force that was stalling their advances.

Emperor Coaxoch the 10th marshalled an impressive defence around the capital city of Celestis in southern Catlan, but the bulk of his forces were westward across the sea in the Golden Army. The Archdruid took the city, and personally planted a beautiful black lily – known as the Archlily – over the corpse of the Emperor, marking the end of the Empire of Catla and a pivotal step towards his goal of returning Akharon to its rightful natural state.

With their lord's death, the Empire's many nobles, priests and citizens dispaired and fled to any point of fleeting safety that they could find. Some cast down their trappings of civilisation, making vows that they would live as animals in the wild. Others fled to the seas to arrive on distant shores and remote islands. A few fled into the arctic south and burning Blood Stone Desert to be taken as slaves by Legion tribes or Twi-Far clans. Most of the aristocracy and clergy ended up in Stronghold, a fortress to the far south around the isolated valley of Pol's Rest and the great metal body of the dead god of magic.

Fumbling at the Finish

After the fall of Celestis the Archdruid's forces started to break up over ideological differences as the end of the war was in sight. Some followed the Archdruid's view that Neph was the one true god, others wished to see Neph's place at the head of the Eternal pantheon restored, while many simply desired vengeance on the Empire and to plunder its wealth.

The Archdruid cared not for those who disagreed with him, killing them or driving them off with great monsters. He formed an alliance with the southern Legion tribes to augment his forces and set his eyes upon Stronghold, the final bastion of civilisation.

Then he disappeared, right before his final victory.

For many years there was much speculation about the fate of the Archdruid. Most hoped him dead, but the wise knew better. The truth was personally revealed by the Archdruid a century later at the severed head of Neph herself. A week outside of Stronghold he was visited by a powerful feminine creature that claimed to be an avatar of Neph. She had implored him to cease his war and succeeded in planting a seed of doubt in his mind.

Pol's Rest & Stronghold

» See Warped Kingdom write-up from pg: 128.

> "A number of ancient Vanguard Guilds remain to this day. They're a delusional sort who are held together by a nostalgic image of what their predecessors could have been."
>
> – Lady Selindra Lagos,
> commentary on ancient organisations.

The citadel of Stronghold was originally built by Tolatl priests during the early years of the Empire of Catla. It was constructed atop a plateau around the massive raised metal arm of Pol, and overlooked a pristine valley that had been formed by the god's falling body after he was killed by Neph. This enclave of priestly scholars and their study of the god of magic was the source of most techno-magical knowledge on Akharon, though it was known as alchemy at the time.

Stronghold was slowly transformed over many years into a fortress to guard against southern Legion raiders (even falling to them on several occasions). During the Druidic War it – and the valley of Pol's Rest – was transformed into a crowded home for a million refugees and their descendents. The people of Stronghold hid behind great walls for decades as the Legion tribes and druidic cults laid siege to their massive city.

The great houses that once ruled entire kingdoms were given towns, villages, mines or public institutions to manage. Without an emperor, the priests, nobles and scholars formed a Regency Council to govern the people. The noble houses chafed against the limits of their influence, but all were happy to just be alive.

Vanguards

With the supposed death of the Archdruid, the people of Stronghold pushed out into the wilds after making peace with the Legion tribes. Over decades they slowly rebuilt overgrown cities, remapped changed landscapes and assimilated roaming refugees and wild tribes into the folds of their emerging civilisation.

At the forefront of these reclamation endeavours were the Vanguards: brave bands of explorers that scouted the wilds and fought back its many monsters to make room for new villages. Most hailed them as heroes, but their allegiances slowly shifted from the Regency Council and civic duty to the coin and promises of power from the noble houses. They became little more than expensive mercenaries and vagabonds during their later years.

The Regency Council and Vanguards were content to move with caution, but all was to change when Neph passed directly over Pol's Rest and blighted its southern lands with wylding. A great beast of myth and legend – a dragon named Languorem – was drawn to its power and made the mining town of Stonevale its nest. A spreading corruption crawled across the valley, poisoning its water, forests and farmlands. The people of Stronghold and Pol's Rest were forced to abandon their sanctuary to avoid starvation.

Rise of the Dragon Languorem

- » See Dragon write-up from pg: 132.
- » See Warped Kingdom write-up from pg: 128.

"Behold! Before me, a great and terrible beast, with teeth that glint like diamonds in the sunlight, scales of midnight black and claws as large as a stag. Its massive form stretches far and wide, and its many heads tower over me like trees in a forest. Each twisted face surveys the world with a piercing gaze, unyielding and unafraid.

Its roar shakes the very earth beneath my feet, and I cannot help but feel a shiver run down my spine. This creature is not of this world, but of some ancient age long forgotten, when titanic beast of Neph ruled Akharon and men cowered in caves."

– Ezra Longdraw,
Vanguard diary.

Shortly after Neph blighted the southern town of Stonevale in Pol's Rest with wylding magic from the heavens, the great dragon Languorem arose to make it his roost. Dragons are the subject of countless myths and legends, and Languorem was the first to be seen since the Age of Darkness.

Dragons never fought alongside the Archdruid as they were sleeping deep underground with minds that were slowly fading away. They were roused to the scent of wylding in their nostrils and emerged to discover the continents of Catlan and Whispering saturated with the precious substance due to the Druidic War.

Languorem used the great reserves of fresh wylding from Stonevale to not only heal his mind, corrupt the valley and create the Dracim (pg: 12). The people of Pol's Rest fled and many dragons were drawn to the valley. The worthy female dragons were transformed into dragon queens, their minds healed and their bodies made strong. The worthy males were not just killed, but absorbed into the great dragon king by abominable magic.

Languorem became a twisted monster of many heads, a nightmare made manifest. With armies of Dracim he pushed the domain of his Warped Kingdom north along the edge of Blood Stone Desert and eventually into the fortress of Stronghold.

His corruption spread, turning the land into a twisted alien landscape of blue and purple spires, tendrils and pustules. The taint of his Warped Kingdom was only halted by the cold of the mountains and the heat of the desert. Techno-mages and Ta'Di seers are constantly tasked with burning its spores that travel the currents of water and air across the many nations of Akharon.

Other great dragon kings who had secured their own domains and lesser sources of wylding have all sent delegates – intelligent Neph Spawn, lesser dragons or slaves – to negotiate with Languorem. They offered fealty and treasures for promises of peace and the secrets of his new wylding techniques. Most dragon kings are now able to create their own Dracim.

Holy Kingdom of Catla

- » See Holy Kingdom of Catla write-up from pg: 102.
- » See House Catla write-up from pg: 108.

"In a land of mystic lore and might,
The Holy Kingdom of Catla took flight,
With noble hearts and an iron will,
A new era dawned, a prophecy fulfilled."

– Opening verse of the
Holy Hymn of Catla.

With the fall of the fortress city of Stronghold to the Dracim armies of the Warped Kingdom, the fledgling nation that was emerging out of the ruins of the Catla Empire was thrown into turmoil. Many great family houses had long been withholding their resources and the full service of their armies, and they used Languorem's success as political leverage against the ruling Regency Council to expand their influence.

The ancient House of Catla was in decline at this time, as they were crippled by debt and had been politically outmanoeuvred by rivals. The only unique power they maintained was in their family name. Many great houses that once ruled the old Empire conspired to overthrow the Regency Council and place the crown on the head of a Catla puppet.

In a single night, all council members were assassinated or driven into hiding in an event that would come to be known as the Night of Tiny Knives. House Catla was given the crown and throne, and the nation was renamed to the Holy Kingdom of Catla.

Massive Growth

Over the following decades the ambitious lords of the Holy Kingdom loosed their stockpiled resources to crush their rivals, pin Languorem's forces into Stronghold and expanded the borders of their lands out west to the Gale Sea. They then pushed north to the great Mon's Reach River and waged a covert war to destabilise the Southern Legion Tribes through political agents and mercenary bandits (eventually leading the Tribes into civil war).

Hundreds of thousands of people had survived the Druidic War, and their descendants who had been hiding on remote islands, underground and in hidden valleys were assimilated into the growing nation. Trade deals were made with the dangerous Drasong Clan Twi-Far in the Blood Stone Desert for slaves, and a long and difficult trade road to the emerging eastern kingdoms was established.

The corrupt houses acted with impunity and were stalled from turning on one another by plundering Akharon for its resources, people and land. It was only a matter of time until the Holy Kingdom started to return to the cultural ways of the old Catla Empire, but with far more slavery (especially of Creet, Dracim and Remnant) and a tokenistic acknowledgement of the goddess Neph. Those who followed non-Eternal religions were looked down upon, and the followers of the All-Being made preparations for their departure.

Kethwick & Techno-Magic

The largest city in the Kingdom was Kethwick (pg: 90), which sits between the Arcane and Neph Bays, and is renowned for being built under the shade of the massive Grateful Oak whose shade can cover the entire city. Its iconic hexagonal walled districts were built around great techno-magical academies and temples to the Eternal gods. It was the nation's capital and home to the great House of Catla who were becoming more than just the puppet rulers of the kingdom.

Despite holding the crown, House Catla controlled less land than other great houses and was being controlled by armies of courtiers, stewards and spies. Though constrained, they heavily financed the arcane arts, craftsman guilds and the education of their children. They were investing in the future of their House to ensure a later generation would regain control when the time was right.

In previous ages, the arcane arts of the Empire were in the domain of the Eternal priesthood, and their practitioners were known as alchemists. They harvested holy Sparks from the body of Pol in Stronghold and mixed them with key components to create potions of power. With the loss of Stronghold, the alchemical arts had fallen into decline and were no longer controlled by the religious elite.

Catla scholars spent decades collecting artefacts from sacred ruins and the bodies of divine servants, such as the mad Children of Pol and the tough Automatons of Dray. They developed new means of crafting magical devices and performing arcane effects. While alchemical potions were still used, they were quickly overshadowed by non-religious practitioners who utilised metallic wands, staffs, sceptres, tomes and blades of power.

This new style of magic came to be known as techno-magic, and it would hand Catla the true authority that they desired.

Reawakening of Catla

For almost two generations before the sundering of the kingdom through civil war (pg: 74), the nation was increasingly ruled by House Catla. The family had cultivated a reputation for cunning and ruthlessness, using techno-magical spies, assassins and political manoeuvring to eliminate rivals and consolidate their power. Their reputation was so feared that even potential adversaries often chose to ally themselves with House Catla to avoid their wrath.

They seized control of key trade routes around the Blood Stone Desert to ensure a steady flow of wealth, resources and slaves. Their coffers were overflowing, allowing them to maintain a powerful standing army and a network of loyal vassals across the land. But the true secret to their success lay in their ability to harness the power of techno-magic.

Catla knew that every newly discovered divine artefact held the potential to reshape Akharon. They also understood that every arcane edge would eventually fall into the hands of their rivals and that apathy and internal corruption were the true killers of houses.

Southern Legion Civil War

» See Southern Legion Tribe write-up from pg: 164.

"They are an unrulable and barbaric people that cannot be defeated through steel and magic. They must be made fat through grain, corrupted with coin and their crude blades turned against each other."

– Faucon Garnier Valdis,
ancient head of House Valdis.

The many wild Legion tribes of the vast southern tundras of the White Expanse have always lived apart from the so-called 'civilised' nations of Akharon. They cared not for the great Catla Empire, and raided their coasts and trade paths for the entire duration of its existence. They were also locked into regular battle with each other and the many monsters of their frozen homeland.

This lifestyle of blood and blade would have crushed any species that were not the Legion. Those big leathery-skinned brutes were built by the goddess Ath for combat, and to flourish against the titanic monsters of the Age of Darkness. They would never have the resources or the technology of their northern counterparts, but every member of their tribe was a skilled hunter and warrior, making them utterly unconquerable.

The Southern Tribes had long worshipped two great goddesses; the wise Ath and the brutal Neph. With the arrival of the Archdruid during the Druidic War the tribes were manipulated by his druidic agents into attacking the Empire. Following the war many tribes made peace with the people of Stronghold and settled in unoccupied northern lands, and were later assimilated into the Holy Kingdom of Catla.

The lords of the Holy Kingdom never trusted their southern allies, as they considered it only a matter of time before they returned to their barbaric roots. For decades the great houses secretly sent agents into the towns of the White Expanse and funded bandits to raid their villages. The tribes had lost their strength due to lives of peace and northern coin. Their collapse was inevitable, and they turned on one another in bloodthirsty rage as their homes fell to bandits and monsters.

From the flames of civil war the Blood Horn tribe rose to power as they skillfully directed the wrath of their people against their true enemies. Northern agents were rooted out and publicly executed, bandit tribes were slaughtered, and monstrous Jötnar and Trolls were driven back.

Jarl Ragnar Stone-Gaze was crowned Lord of Ice, and forced all tribes to swear fealty to his Blood Horn tribe under threat of death. His reign was short, brutal and defining for the Southern Tribes. All political ties to the northern lands were cut and the Legion returned to the joys of their old ways. They were a people that flourished under physical hardship and required the bonds of tradition and the comradery of the battlefield to flourish.

Age of Gods

"I've always known that the gods are not to be trifled with. They're not some distant beings that only exist in stories – they're real and take an interest in our actions. They're not always kind, and they're certainly not always fair. But they're powerful, and we mortals must be mindful of them if we hope to flourish in this world. Treat them as a peasant would a king and queen."

– Baron Amos Sadeh.

Triggered by the death of Neph, this new Age of Gods echoes the early Age of Illumination. The gods may not freely walk the earth and mingle with mortals as they once did, but they are more active than they have been for almost a thousand years. The heavens occasionally flash with brilliant lights of their activity, divine avatars sporadically visit mortal settlements, and they are less hesitant to take direct action against nations who are a threat to their plans.

Death of Neph

"Here lies the head of Neph, hated goddess of nature. Her rage against civilisation was finally silenced by the fell blade of the meek Fik. From her green wylding blood arose her daughters Nijin and Jinin to take her place as wardens of life and death. Let us love these new gods as we did not love their mother, lest we bring about their rage and a repeat of history."

– Tlaloc Catla,
expedition commander to Neph's head.

All previous ages beyond Creation have been dominated by Neph: the immensely powerful goddess of nature, life, death and the firstborn of the deities. It was she who held Akharon in the Age of Darkness for thousands of years, killed her brother Pol and empowered the Archdruid to destroy the Empire of Catla. Even in death, her legacy remains a defining force in the world.

Rage of the Meek

It is not known if the Archdruid was truly visited by an avatar of the goddess during the final stage of his great war against civilisation, but Neph grew in anger as the plague of progress from the Holy Kingdom of Catla once again culled her new wild lands that the Archdruid had ceded. She seethed as beautiful forests were once again replaced by cities and farms, her monsters slain, her beasts enslaved and peaceful animals fattened in pens for slaughter.

In desperation, the goddess went to her brother Dray to convince him to construct a weapon to replace her lost spear Ire. The god of passion and craftmanship had long craved for the love of the elusive goddess Nix who toyed with his affections. Neph promised Dray a unique blue tulip with the power to excite the desires of any it was gifted to. The soft-hearted god looked upon the flower she held before him with longing, knowing that she spoke the truth. But he understood that what she offered was only lust and not love.

As he turned Neph away she unleashed her suppressed rage and bit Dray's neck with bestial teeth and threatened him with death by the end of the day if he did not craft her a weapon. With tear-soaked hands he took up his tools, but unknown to both the quiet and meek goddess Fik had been watching the exchange through a window. The little goddess was accustomed to being overlooked and had long admired Dray for his worthy character, but she dared not approach the gentle giant of a man due to her shyness and few words.

In an uncharacteristic display of determination, the goddess Fik took up her scissors and confronted the mighty Neph with shakey rage. With a stern face, she uttered the words that would come to be displayed in all future temples to the goddess of silence and the cosmos:

"Be silent wretched fiend, for anguish comes to those who can not hear beyond their own voice."

Without hesitation, Neph roared as she lunged at Fik. With a single snip the head of the indomitable goddess of nature was separated from her neck. In a moment of impulsive revoltion, Dray kicked his sister's head out of his workshop where it plummeted to Akharon in a ball of fire that was seen by all mortals who watched the skies.

To the envy of Nix, a kindly love was kindled between the handsome Dray and the unassuming Fik. The two were soon married and forever only had eyes for each other.

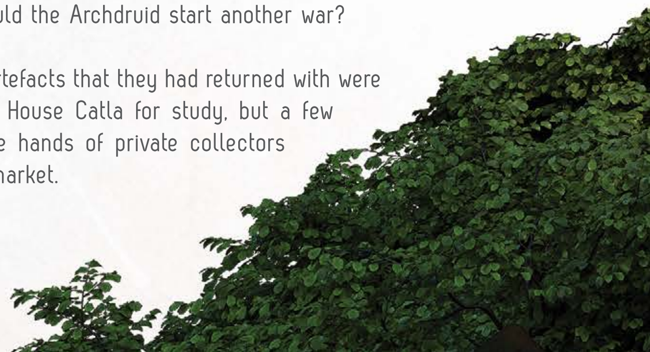
Fated Expedition

Down on Akharon, Catla scholars were quick to calculate the location of the fallen divine object to be north within the Twisted Forest. A large expedition of knights, soldiers, techno-mages and labourers was put together to secure the site for the Holy Kingdom. The campaign fought hard through monster-infested forests and mountains for many months and were shocked to discover their prize to be the severed head of Neph. A great big tendrilled lump that filled its long crater with dangerous wylding.

They also discovered two young flighty goddesses (later named Nijin and Jinin) swimming in the green blood, but no sooner had they secured the site when the ancient Archdruid arrived with a force of his own. The two groups briefly talked, but the inevitable conflict was one-sided as the mighty demigod of druidic magic laid waste to the entire expedition.

Many months later a few ragged survivors would return to the Holy Kingdom. Lords, clergy, scholars and peasants alike marvelled at their tales and speculated about what these great events would mean for the future. Who had killed Neph? Who were these two new goddesses? Would the Archdruid start another war?

Most of the artefacts that they had returned with were handed over to House Catla for study, but a few ended up in the hands of private collectors and the black market.



Spear Ire & Civil War

- » See Kingdom of Ire write-up from pg: 82.
- » See Holy Kindom of Catla write-up from pg: 102.

"Tyrants are the tinder of revolution."

– Luitgard Crispscale,
former Dracim slave.

Several years after Neph's death an unremarkable Legion scholar named Theseus Noskos was approached by a Kaltoran lord from House Valdis. The noble was experiencing financial troubles due to gambling debts and was looking to sell several divine artefacts from his private collection. This was an illegal transaction as all such objects were to be first offered to House Catla so that they may be studied by their techno-mages.

Master Noskos was going to pass on the deal, but noted a peculiar organic shell-like object that he knew had not been seen before in scholarly circles. He procured the item along with others of minor note to not arouse suspicion. He quickly set to translate the many divine runes that were imprinted upon the surface of the object. It was a map that had been acquired from the head of Neph, and it highlighted a specific location to the south in the frozen White Expanse.

Too old for such a dangerous journey, he sold belongings for funds and tasked his twin blooded Legion-Remnant son, Hercule Noskos, with the task of investigating the site. Hercule gathered a team of trusted adventure-seeking friends and travelled into the barbaric lands where he found an item of unimaginable power: the spear Ire, the fabled lost weapon of Neph and killer of Pol.

Embers of Home

While Hercule was away, agents of House Catla had discovered his father's illicit dealings. Theseus and his immediate family were tied to steaks and killed by fire, a public spectacle that they dared not apply to House Valdis despite their shared guilt. Hercule and his companions were set upon by a dozen guards at the moment of their return, but without command, Ire awakened from its slumber and killed those who threatened its new master.

Wanting the great spear for themselves, House Catla marshalled an army to capture the wayward twin blood: a thousand trained soldiers with the support of techno-mages. During this time, Ire had physically bonded with Hercule and news of his power was spreading across the land. The Holy Kingdom of Catla had long chafed under the brutality of the Great Houses: it was a kingdom built upon the backs of slaves and corruption, a tinderbox awaiting a spark.

That flame came at the capital city of Kethwick itself. History books would later say that Hercule marched up to the massive walls to issue a personal challenge against the evil king, but the truth is more likely that he was wracked by fear and wanted to plead for mercy. The gathered army set upon the lone man at the gates, and it is there that they died. Ire had a mind of its own and was unwilling to be cowed by its fearful host.

The King of Catla fled as the forces of Kethwick fell. The flames of civil war swept across the nation as slaves, peasants, serfs and (supposedly) good-hearted nobles rose up with righteous rage. Hercule would soon find his courage and personally lead many attacks against the toughest foes.

Akh's Intervention

Over the coming year the nation was split in two, with rebels loosely claiming the south below the Eternal Mountains. The culmination of the war came at the open fields that would come to be known as Akh's Line. Loyalist forces outnumbered the rebels and they had recruited wylding wielders to suppress the powers of Ire. It was going to be a blood bath, and even Hercule Noskos had accepted his fate as a martyr.

The rebel king stood at the front of his forces and led the charge towards the thickest of the enemy positions. Ire spun and whirled through the air, and allowed its master to ignore lethal wounds. But this is when history was changed through direct divine intervention: the holy sun god Akh reached out his will and sundered the fields with a great beam of golden fire from a metal chariot in the air.

The will of the gods was clear, this war ends now or all will die.

The south-eastern lands became the Kingdom of Ire and was ruled by the reluctant demigod Noskos who lives on to this day. House Catla claimed land from fallen and traitor lords in the north-west and set to rebuilding their Holy Kingdom of Catla.

The Now

It is now two centuries past the Druidic War and seventy since the civil war that formed the Kingdom of Ire. Akharon is not as it once was, techno-magic, demigods, and the emergence of new gods and species have changed every walk of life. Those with the courage, wisdom and strength to fight for their future will survive.

Malevolent forces surround Ire on all sides: Twi-Far desert slavers and warped draconic armies to the east, forest monsters to the north, arctic Legion raiders to the south, and Catla political and economic rivals to the west. The fledgling kingdom will be made or broken during this age. They are not the wealthiest or mightiest of nations, but there is hope as they are both durable and adaptable. If Ire can succeed on a single front they may gain the foothold that they need to survive and flourish. They must break out of their locked-in position to reach the land, resources and people of wider Akharon.

The default presumption of Fragged Kingdom 2 is that most games will be set within the Kingdom of Ire. They are a young and plucky nation who are surrounded by threats and opportunities on all sides – an ideal place for PCs to have adventures.

Truth

Fragged Kingdom 2 is set in the same science fiction universe as Fragged Empire, and reading the Fragged Empire 2 Setting Guide book (along with other lore-focused books) will give you a greater understanding of the species and arcane powers on Akharon. Fragged Kingdom is set an unknown amount of time after the events of Fragged Empire and the state of the wider galaxy is undefined.

Creation & Colonisation

Akharon was terraformed and seeded with flora and fauna over ten thousand years ago by Human-made titanic machines. Technologicall advanced Humans only lived on Akharon in small, well-hidden communities before going extinct. The genetically-engineered descendants of Humanity - known as Archons - settled on Akharon for a brief time during a great war to establish secret military bases.

During this war the planet was infested by insane killer robots called Mechonids, who were assaulted in turn by genetically engineered monsters known as Nephilim. The Nephilim killed the Archons and altered large portions of the planet's biodiversity, but the Mechonids overpowered the Nephilim and went into hibernation after they lacked sentient targets to attack.

During this time Creet refugees arrived and destroyed all of their spaceships to hide from the slumbering Mechonids and remaining feral Nephilim who had turned beastal. Akharon was discovered over a century after the great war by a megacorporation known as the Dray Mining Consortium (DMC), who moved in thousands of indentured workers (Tolatl and modified Zhou) and Legion mercenaries. They were shortly followed by Kaltoran, Remnant and Twi-Far colonists.

During this time the planet was also infected with swarms of psionic nanites, ghostly echoes and eldritch energy beings known as Faren. Something is drawing all of these groups to Akharon.

Devolution

Exploiting Akharon for its resources was unproductive for the DMC and they used a worker uprising along with a large Ley Dust storm as justification to evacuate without the cost of transporting their workforce. Awoken by the conflict, the Mechonids destroyed all spacecraft and communication systems in a single brutally efficient digital strike. The colonists and workers were forced to abandon their homes and technology as they scattered into the wildlands.

The wider galactic community forgot Akharon (assisted by a DMC cover-up), and its people technologically devolved as a means of survival. Within a few generations, all advanced technology was seen as magic, and many great galactic figures and factions were mythologised. The psionic nanites multiplied and assisted in this technological regression, along with reforming minds and reality to match people's expectations of magic and the divine.

Myth turned Reality

During this time psionic nanite swarms have grown in power, gained purpose and begun to alter Akharon to make their mythological past a reality. Likewise, otherworldly Faren have found agrarian minds easier to understand and are taking on the personas and forms of spirit animals. It is even likely that psionic All-Entities have begun to manifest real Eternal gods with personalities and power. The psionic nanites have culturally caged the people of Akharon, but are also keeping them alive by ensuring the Mechonids (now known as Children of Pol) do not awaken on mass to kill them all.

Time & Ley Storm

It is uncertain how long Akharon has been inhabited by its current population, as the entire star system is engulfed in a Ley Dust storm that has only just begun to dissipate. This storm has caused time to pass at an accelerated rate for those on Akharon. If thousands of years have passed, then Akharon's ancient history becomes much more real, despite its mythologisation.

Rediscovery

During the last two centuries (Akharon time) the wider galactic community has rediscovered the planet, but they are trying to keep their distance. Possible reasons:

- Akharon is infested by dangerous forces. Such as slumbering Mechonid factories that can produce armies of soldiers if awoken, swarms of nanites that will reprogram their computers to make them work in a fantasy world of magic, or powerful Faren that insist on acting like strange nature spirits and can attach themselves to non-Twi-Far.
- Galactic community has become an enlightened people who have a policy of non-interference towards developing cultures. This may be for the safety of the primitive people or the integrity of scientifically studying their development (especially if thousands of years have passed on Akharon due to the Ley Dust storm).
- Lack of valuable resources on Akharon.
- The Ley Dust storm is difficult to navigate, only allowing small teams to spend limited time on Akharon without being lost in time.
- Standoff between rival factions who do not wish to trigger a conflict by moving on Akharon without an agreement.

No matter the reason, there are those who have travelled down to Akharon for selfish or research purposes. Many go unnoticed, but some have greatly shaped history. Such as the killing of the god Neph (who was an massive organic Nephilim warship that crashed to the planet), the ending of the civil war that formed the Kingdom of Ire, and possibly also an Emessary Nephilim changing the mind of the Archdruid by pretending to be an avatar of Neph.

Some individuals of note - such as the god Dos and the dragon Languorem - may know parts of the true truth, but they may like the current state of the world or are unable to change things.

Advice on Matters of Myth & Magic

"Religious rituals bind people together in ways that create strong, cohesive communities."

– Jonathan Haidt,
ancient Human.

"Any sufficiently advanced technology is indistinguishable from magic."

– Arthur C. Clarke,
ancient Human.

The 'true truth' of Akharon can be embraced or set aside as much as you like in your personal games. The world's sci-fi elements are only there to add depth to the lore, offering structure to magic while preserving a sense of mystery.

The people of Akharon may use terms like 'magic' and 'divine', but these are just words to place mysterious forces, great beings and philosophical ideas into cultural containers. The people of Akharon are not fools, they are grounded people with hard lives who understand reality through a pragmatic-first lens and not a scientific one. Religion is an efficient vessel for philosophical ideas that ensures cultural cohesion. Without religion their societies would grow weak, disconnected and unmotivated.

Example Truths:

» Enchantment = Psionics.
  » Nix/Fey Dust = Ley Dust and psionic nanites.
» Techno-Magic = Adapted sci-fi technology.
» Wylding = Organic bio-tech (ie: mutagenic fluid).

» Automatons of Dray = FLESH and Synthsteel robots.
» Children of Pol = Mechonids.
» Dracim, Giants, Neph Spawn and most monsters = Nephilim.
» Dryads, Elementals and Nymphs = Zhou.
» Ethereal Spirits = Faren.
» Royal Dragons = Genocrat Nephilim.
» Wraiths = Echoes.

» Dos = Psychopath MVP Palantor or Mechonid.
» Neph = Massive Nephilim warship.
» Pol = Giant Mechonid, Palantor or terraforming robot.
» Ugra'thok= Mountain-sized Oni.

Example Nanites Powers:

- Change minds.
  - Including dreams, memories and the creation of divine visions of gods.
- Gradual creation of All-Entities of the Eternal Gods.
- Instantly alter computer code to respond to magic incantations, runes and other 'magic-like' methods.
- Reshape Synthsteel.
  - Including entire ancient Corp facilities into divine ruins, and metallic robots into techno-magical clockwork soldiers.
- Slowly etch away paint and carve markings into hard objects.

"Are you sure these recordings are reliable, and this isn't some kind of strange practical joke?" Tribune Bion asked, eyeing the flickering screen with scepticism.

"Yes, sir," Specialist Ismene replied, her fingers dancing over the controls. "They are ancient human tech and appear to be immune to nanite interference... though the same can not be said for the facility they were observing."

Bion frowned, leaning closer to the display. "It's just that... hmmm... it looks as if a wizard is attempting to turn on an extremely dead computer with a magic spell."

"Ah... yes, sir," Ismene replied, nodding. "I believe your assessment is accurate."

"It was the pointed hat, beard, staff and glowing spells that tipped me off. I think I've seen enough, let's look over the other data."

"May I suggest the tribune watch the rest of the recording? It's about to get much more interesting, sir."

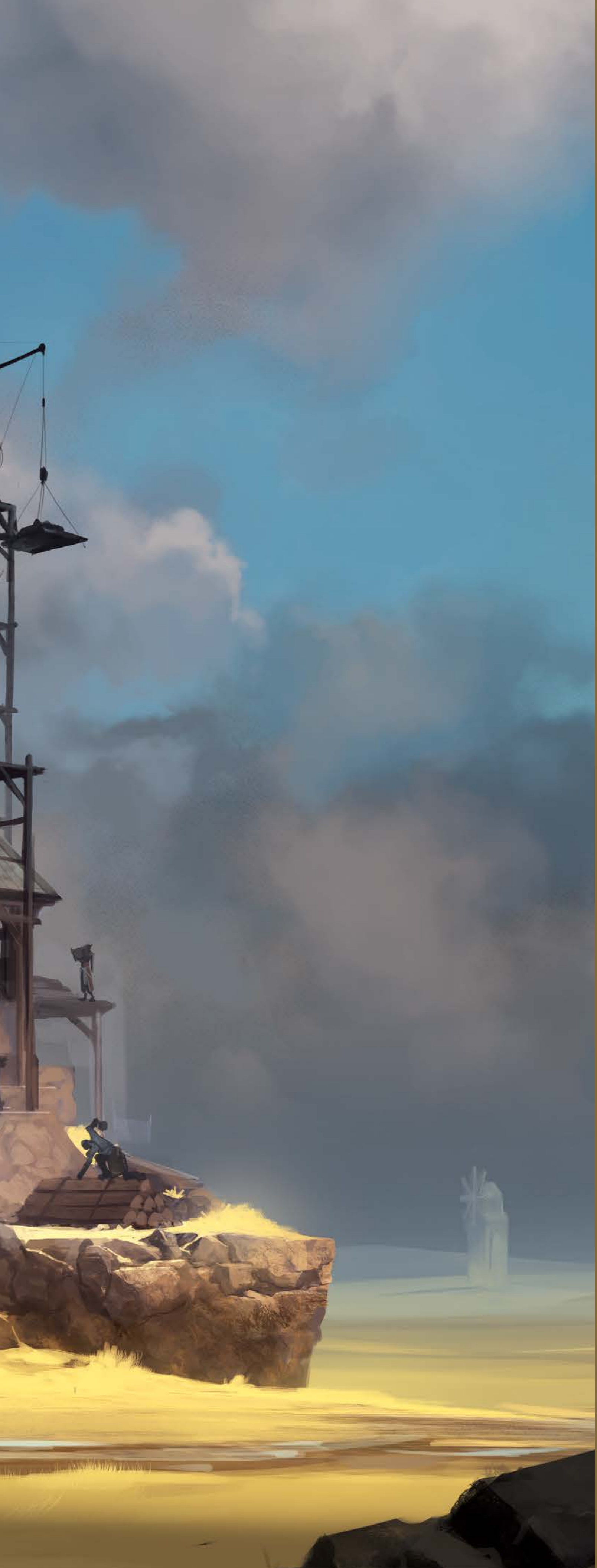
Ismene was correct, not only had the wizard succeeded in unlocking the ancient computer, they were now interacting with an operating system of gibberish runes through incantations and elaborate hand gestures.

– Legion team Alpha Aether VI,
observing research data from the planet Akharon.

Roxana gazed down upon the planet from her observation deck, her spacecraft's finely tuned cameras filling the dozen screens that lined the walls with flickering images and grainy recordings of a primitive world – crude stone fortresses, animal-drawn carts, and false gods. Her fellow All-Adherants struggled, but they were not alone and the message of the All-Being was spreading far more succesfully than it was in her universe of spaceships, computers and factories. There were even Nephilim All-Monks, Tolatl missionaries, resurrected Kaltorans and Twi-Far such as herself who had bound themselves to the one true god.

They had the All-Being, whose power was unaffected by the nanites. Roxana understood that her god did not need technology; he cared only for the soul and was using the primitive world's hardships for his holy purpose.

– Roxana Stargold,
Twi-Far Seraphim Symphony.



Nations

No amount of poring over architectural sketches had prepared Izel for the sheer scale of the windmills. He stood on the windswept cliff edge, spellbound by the distant monoliths looming on the horizon, wheels already steadily rotating.

"We rise upon the benevolent shoulders of ancients," said Salome, absently placing a hand on her wide-brimmed hat as a breeze played across their faces. "It's so peaceful. I remember this as a battlefield."

Izel looked up at the young Kaltoran witch in surprise. "Your ancestors fought here?"

Salome nodded. "During the Empire campaigns, and again in the Druidic War. This plain is soaked in my people's blood." Seeming to remember herself, she awkwardly cleared her throat. "I mean, was."

"Well, the future is looking far brighter," Izel said. He pointed excitedly to the nearest windmill. "In fact, this is cutting-edge techno-magic. They say it'll infuse the soil for ten times the yield!"

"The pendulum swings from death to life," Salome murmured. "Take it from a Kaltoran: we really have come a long way."

"And there's still so much left ahead of us."

The two sank into their own contemplations, Salome's thoughts roaming to a brutal past, and Izel imagining the wonders that lay in the future. Whether a single life or the span of nations, time flowed ever onward; and so the two turned from the cliff face, returning to their companions and the winding path.

Overview

» See History write-up from pg: 61.

“History is not clean and orderly. It is meandering stories of seemingly uneventful decades interrupted by moments of monumental upheaval. Gods clash, nameless heroes perish unrecorded and random chance reshapes nations.”

– Master Solomon Script,
Codex Histuris.

All nations of Akharon have all been shaped in some way by the massive Empire of Catla that once spanned the current continents of Catlan and the Whispering. Eternal priests say it was the first civilised nation to arise out of the turbulent Age of Darkness, and once played host to the gods themselves when they mingled with mortals.

The empire expanded through blood, politics, coin and magic. For hundreds of years, it dominated Akharon and unified many of its people under a shared culture and pushed out those who would not conform. All came to a brutal end when the demigod Archdruid arose and gathered an unstoppable army of monsters, druids and barbarian allies to lay waste to the entire empire. Small pockets of civilisation survived, and some would blossom to form new nations.

Great Split

The greatest of these emerging countries was the reformed Holy Kingdom of Catla which sought to rebuild the old empire from its ashes. This dream died when the goddess Neph was slain by Fik and an unknown twin blooded son of a scholar discovered Neph's lost divine spear Ire. A civil war was triggered and the nation was split in two; forming the eastern Kingdom of Ire and the western Holy Kingdom of Catla.

Wider World Comes to Catla

The ancient Empire of Catla was a land-based culture that was only vaguely familiar with the distant nations across Akhoran's vast oceans; Twi-Far to the east and giants to the west. They were also unaware of the great dragons that slumbered under the earth or the secretive Creet who were hiding in wild lands and mountains beyond their borders.

When the empire fell during the Druidic War and their cities and roads were replaced by wylding magic with forests, streams and mountains, it created a power and resource vacuum that pulled at Akharon's surviving occupants. Twi-Far slavers emerged from the Blood Stone Desert and peaceful Ta'Di seers from the distant islands of Fari and Eyna. Giants invaded the Holy Kingdom of Catla from across the Gale Sea to steal land and food for their insatiable god, massive dragons awoke to claim wylding power and many Creet whose descendants had been enslaved by the druids found themselves unable to return to their ancestral homes.

The continent of Catlan is a turbulent maelstrom of species, cultures and nations. Each with its own complex set of ambitions, strengths and weaknesses. None can tell who will flourish or fall.

Feudal Societies

The dominant socio-economic and political system across Akharon's many nations is feudalism, or a close proximity to it. It has a hierarchical structure where noble lords grant land and protection to vassals in exchange for loyalty and service. This system forms a basis of power and authority, with peasants and serfs working the land to provide agricultural produce while the nobility provide civic services and military protection.

Monarchs & Nobles

The monarch holds ultimate authority within their nation, but power is decentralized to allow lords considerable autonomy in their territories. Landless nobles have less standing and most spend their time socializing and seeking entertainment.

A vassal is a landed noble who has pledged loyalty and service to a higher-ranking noble in exchange for land (fief) and their lord's protection. This relationship is defined by a formal agreement called a 'feudal contract,' which outlines the vassal's obligations. These typically include military aid and a taxation of coin and produce.

- Landed nobles in the Kingdom of Ire have greater freedom than their counterparts in other nations.
- Feudal contracts are particularly robust and heavy-handed in the Holy Kindom of Catla.

Religion

Religion not only informs but also legitimizes political and legal structures within all nations. In the realm of politics, the concept of divine favour is paramount, and leaders often seek religious validation to bolster their authority. Decisions regarding alliances, conflicts, and even legislation are made with religious considerations, including consultations with priests and oracles.

Legal systems are deeply rooted in religious ethics, with oaths sworn to the gods serving as the foundation of many contracts and testimonies. Those who fail are often denounced for offending the gods through excessive pride or failure to show sufficient piety.

- The **Eternal** faith is the most common religion and is even followed in alternative forms by many intelligent monsters. It is particularly interested in politics, techno-magic and treats other religions with some suspicion, especially within the Holy Kingdom of Catla and Panos Theocracy.
- The **All-Faith** religion is less common but requires greater personal conviction from its adherents. All-Monk leaders are considered to be above political leaders, skilled martial artists and are particularly resistant to outside moral pressures. All-Faith is primarily interested in matters of personal growth.
- The animistic **Ta'Di** religion has two common forms; a traditional style that is primarily practised by Twi-Far, and a reformed style that embraces the Eternal gods and is primarily practised by Kaltorans. Ta'Di is particularly interested in matters of balance with nature and spirits.

Guilds & Trade

Guilds play a significant role within the political and legal structures of many nations, serving as influential bodies that shape economic policies and the distribution of resources. These associations of craftsmen and merchants wield substantial influence over local governance, often securing privileges and monopolies through negotiations with rulers and city authorities. Guilds establish standards for product quality, training and apprenticeship, which, in turn, contribute to legal frameworks that govern trade and commerce.

Their structured hierarchies and codes of conduct provide a basis for dispute resolution and legal recourse within their respective trades. Additionally, guilds contribute to the broader political landscape by participating in urban governance and representing the interests of their members in matters of taxation, market access, and labor relations, making them pivotal players in the political and legal affairs.

» Guilds are particularly strong within the Kingdom of Ire and the Tarquinius Republic.

Currency

Within the Eternal religion all money is seen as inherently belonging to the goddess Corp by divine right, with all civilised coins bearing depictions of her visage or domains of influence. These vary by region and value, but inevitably feature 'fair' and 'foul' sides; for example, a fair side could depict a calm sea voyage, while a foul side shows a merchant being consumed by a monster.

The ancient Empire of Catla established the tradition of minting coins from alchemically mixed metals that are both harvested from divine ruins and mined from the ground.

Peasants, Serfs, Slaves & Thralls

Peasants comprise the largest segment of all agrarian societies, working land that they own or lease from a local landowner. Serfs are bound to the land they work and their freedom is limited. They owe labour and produce to the lord in exchange for protection and the right to work the land. Slaves and thralls are the most marginalized of people as they are considered property, are devoid of personal freedom and forced to work without compensation.

» Slavery was common within the ancient Empire of Catla; particularly Remnant, convicts and those who rejected the Eternal priesthood (especially All-Faith).
» The Archdruid enslaved many Verdant Creet to fight for him during the Druidic War.
» Slavery is extremely widespread among the Drasong Clan from the Blood Stone Desert; particularly Ashen Creet and Dracim.
» Slavery is common within the Holy Kingdom of Catla; particularly Creet, Remnant and Dracim.
» Slavery is practiced by Southern Legion Tribes who often take thralls when they raid the Kingdom of Ire.
» Slavery is illegal within the Kingdom of Ire.

Example Feudal Titles

In order of power.

Emperor / Empress
  » Ruler of multiple kingdoms.
King / Queen
  » Ruler of multiple duchies.
Archduke / Archduchess
  » Ruler of a duchy who is a member of the royal family and next in line for the throne.
Grand Duke / Grand Duchess
  » Ruler of a large duchy, known as a grand duchy.
Duke / Duchess
  » Ruler of a duchy.
Marquess / Marchioness
  » Ruler of a large county, known as a marquessate.
Earl / Countess
  » Ruler of a county.
Viscount / Viscountess
  » Ruler of a large barony, known as a viscounty.
Baron / Baroness
  » Ruler of a barony.
Knight
  » A title bestowed for honourable military service.
Mayor
  » Ruler of a city and the surrounding mayoralty.
Landed Lord
Freeman

Example Land Titles

In order of size.

Empire		
Kingdom	Nation	
Duchy	Chiefdom	Principality
County	Territory	Region
Barony	Fiefdom	Realm
Mayoralty	Township	Village

Example Guild Titles

In order of influence.

Archmaster
  » Leader of a guild that spans multiple nations.
Grand Master
  » Leader of a guild's interests within a nation.
Hall Master
  » Leader of a guild's interests within a large city.
Master
  » Leader of a group of guild artisans and journeymen.
Artisan
  » Expert in a particular craft or trade.
Journeyman
Apprentice

Kingdom of Ire

- See Civil War write-up on pg: 74.
- See Kethwick write-up from pg: 90.
- See picture of Kethwick on Rule Book pg: 92.

- **Ruler:** King Hercule Noskos (twin blood Legion-Remnant).
- **Capital:** Kethwick.
- **Cultural Notes:**
  - Nation was formed from those who rebelled against the Holy Kingdom of Catla.
  - Emphasis on freedom and local governance over centralized monarchical authority.
    - National cohesion and security are dependent on the power of their demigod King and his divine spear Ire.
  - Pluralistic nation with many different religions and cultures.
    - Eternal priesthood remains dominant.
- **Legal Notes:**
  - Many royal decisions are delegated to the Regency Council of lords, guild masters and religious leaders.
  - Laws vary greatly between regions as each lord is required to define local ordinances and enforce order.
  - Violence is commonly used to settle land disputes, serious crimes (murder) and the culling of monsters.
  - Strong anti-slavery laws.
- **Economic Strengths:** Food, lumber, ore, textiles, wylding.

"Ire is blessed to be ruled by a demigod King who is both reluctant to command and resistant to political factionalization. Lord Hercule Noskos has primarily made himself to be a guardian of the realm and a source of stability. A uniting figurehead for our many cultures, faiths and species, and a spear to strike down those who would cause us harm.

He is over a century old and his twin blood heritage has denied him offspring. Will all be undone when he goes down to the grave? Will our many differences pull us apart? Or will the spear Ire select another? Are we truly ruled by a man or the weapon of a dead goddess?"

– Vimbai Uchenjeri,
Will We Pull Ourselves Apart? Vol IIV.

Rising from the ashes of civil war, the Kingdom of Ire has grown to become a vibrant tapestry of many cultures, religions and people. From the frontier forest towns in the north to the bustling cosmopolitan cities of the central duchies, Ire's variance is its unique quality. Crossing a regional border within the kingdom is akin to crossing into a new nation, as many cultural aesthetics, faiths and laws immediately change.

While some of Ire's noble lords have good intentions and the skills required to govern their lands, others are petty tyrants or incompetent libertines. Each ruler is given broad authority to run their domain as they will, and unity within the nation is only possible due to the demigod might of the king and the many threats to their nation that bind them in purpose.

Culture

There are numerous shared threads within the intricate tapestries of Ire's many people. Common values born of their historical fight for independence, engrained through the rigours of life, technological advancement and the countless exchanges between their people.

Near eighty per cent of all citizens in Ire are peasants or serfs; rural agricultural labourers who are bound to land owners for provision and protection. Almost twenty per cent of people work a skilled job, such as merchants, craftsmen, scholars, priests and other urban dwellers. Less than five per cent are nobility and only a tiny portion of those own land beyond a private residence.

Arcane Technology

While manual labour dominates most vocations in Ire, techno-magical tools are common in all cities and are spreading into rural towns. Lightning-powered street lamps, windmills augmented by gravity engines, magically-sustained blacksmith furnaces, alchemical printing presses and ice boxes are all reasonably common. These items are particularly prevalent in towns that follow the Eternal priesthood.

Food, Inns, Taverns & News

The kingdom is a land of many cultures, with a strong tradition of inns and taverns. Sharing a meal is an opportunity to share news and strengthen local bonds. To flourish in this land of endless happenings, one must stay informed, embrace new foods and welcome travellers.

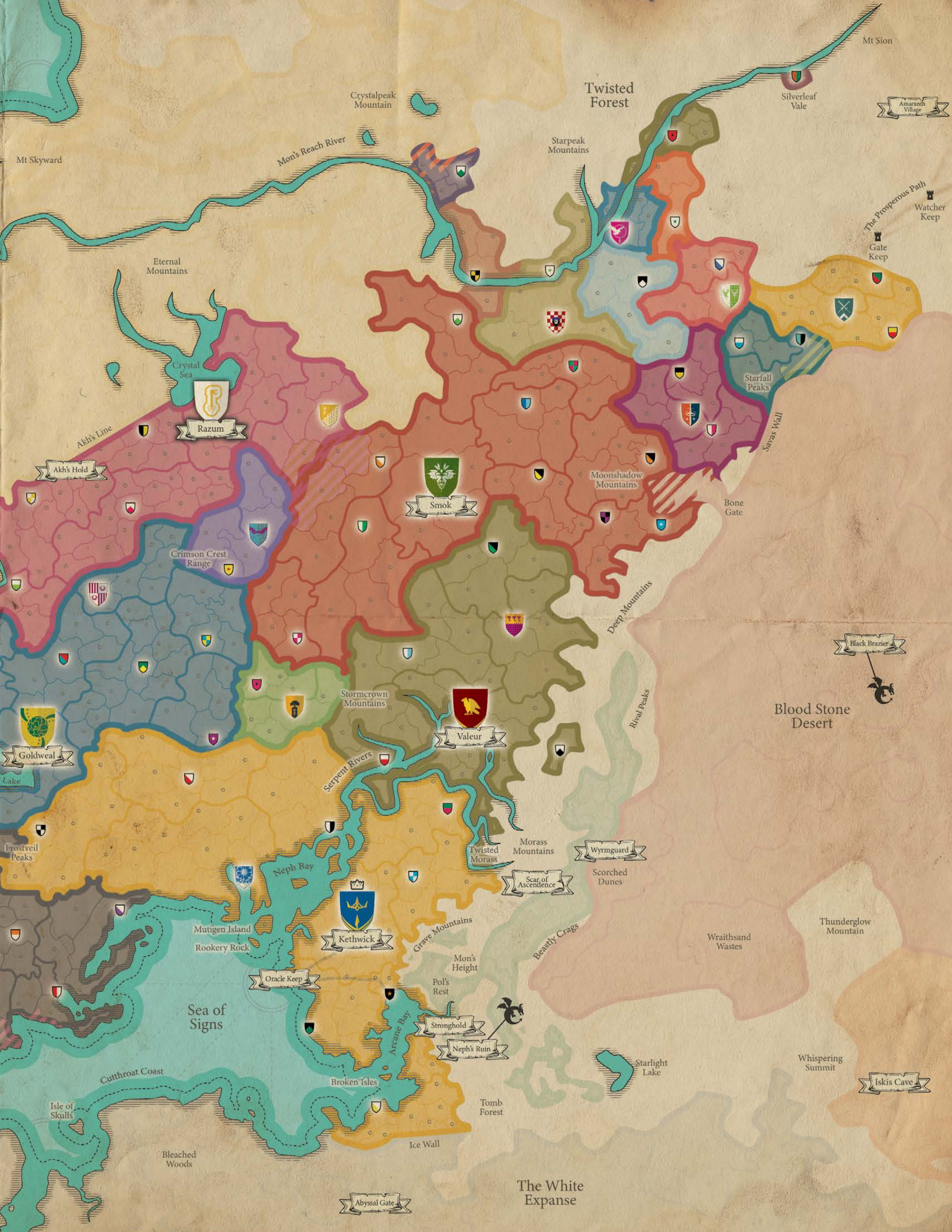
Religion

The people of Ire are deeply religious and the Eternal faith is the most widespread, though it has taken on a more inclusive tone than in other nations. It is not uncommon for Eternal, All-Faith and Ta'Di temples to stand alongside each other in a religious district within a city. Those without a spiritual allegiance (such as many Creet) are often viewed as morally suspect.

Traveller shrines to the goddess Corp or a local spirit are a common sight along all roads, even if they are little more than a pile of rocks with an etched icon. All settlements will have a shrine or religious building dedicated to their dominant local faith, and most of these double as educational institutions.

As each faith has its own spheres of arcane focus, this strongly flavours the resources and knowledge of a local population. While Eternal priests enjoy more political influence and access to techno-magic, those who follow the Ta'Di live in greater harmony with nearby wild lands, and disciples of the All-Faith tend to be educated and healthier.

Frosthold Range
Coral Gulf
Candle
Whitestone Island
Eternal Island
Radiant Isle
Dignitas
Litturgy Island
God's Fang


Mt Sion
Twisted Forest
Crystalpeak Mountain
Silverleaf Vale
Amaranth Village
Starpeak Mountains
Mon's Reach River
Mt Skyward
The Prosperous Path
Watcher Keep
Gate Keep
Eternal Mountains
Crystal Sea
Razum
Akh's Line
Akh's Hold
Starfall Peaks
Savas Wall
Moonshadow Mountains
Smok
Bone Gate
Crimson Crest Range
Deep Mountains
Black Brazier
Stormcrown Mountains
Valeur
Rival Peaks
Blood Stone Desert
Goldweal
Serpent Rivers
Lake
Frostveil Peaks
Neph Bay
Twisted Morass
Morass Mountains
Wyrmguard
Scar of Ascendence
Scorched Dunes
Mutigen Island
Kethwick
Grave Mountains
Rookery Rock
Beastly Crags
Thunderglow Mountain
Wraithsand Wastes
Mon's Height
Oracle Keep
Pol's Rest
Sea of Signs
Stronghold
Arcane Bay
Neph's Ruin
Starlight Lake
Whispering Summit
Cutthroat Coast
Broken Isles
Iskis Cave
Isle of Skulls
Tomb Forest
Ice Wall
Bleached Woods
The White Expanse
Abyssal Gate

Guilds

The great guilds are a growing power across Ire as they gain wealth, technical skills and public support as a means to elevate people's prospects through skilled labour. In times past it would be unthinkable for a techno-mage to not come out of the Eternal priesthood, for a merchant to rival the wealth of a landed lord, or for foreign affairs to be negotiated by mercenaries. Times are changing, and the power of coin, skill and connections are growing.

Ire is particularly known for its large and varied guilds that not only span their entire kingdom but also cross into other nations. While the Holy Kingdom of Catla is resistant to their influence, the Tarquinius Republic is ruled by their guilds and small branches can even be found within the hostile Drasong Clan.

Company of the Silver Sail

A seafaring guild that is well-known within Ire for its ability to avoid Southern Legion Raiders and patrols from the Holy Kingdom of Catla within the Sea of Signs. Their income primarily comes from transportation and the management of numerous fishing docks.

Consortium of Dark Whispers

A guild loyal to King Noskos that trades in political secrets, espionage and assassination. Little is known of their ways, but they're rumoured to be led by the Kaltoran vampire Ezekiel Vacubus. Their skilled agents are active within most nations apart from the Warped Kingdom and the Archdruid's Realm, and are deeply embedded within the Holy Kingdom of Catla.

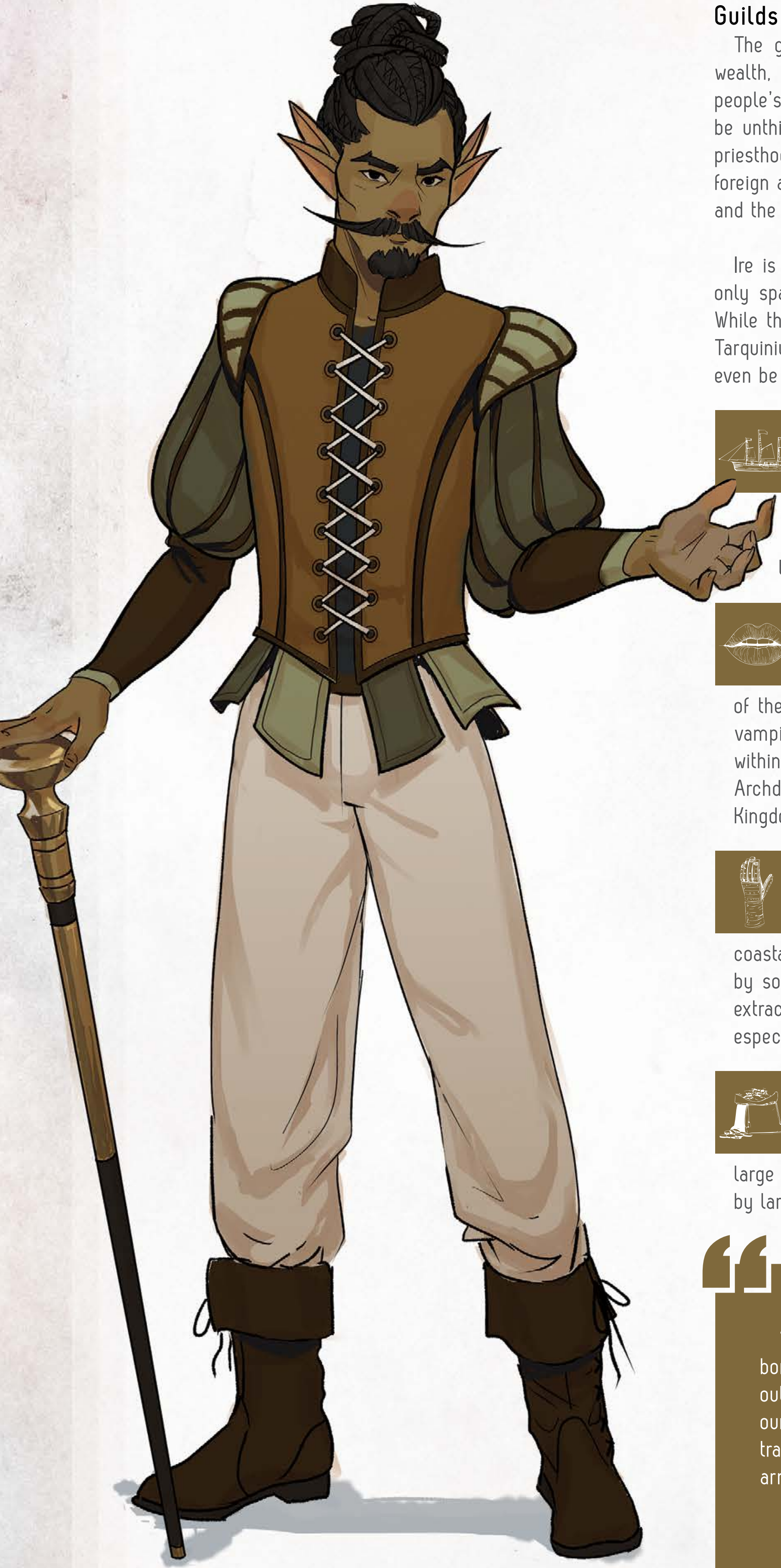
Golden Hand Mercantile Guild

This guild claims to have ties back to the ancient Golden Army of Catla and specializes in fighting coastal battles against Giants and southern Legion raiders. Seen by some to be no better than pirates as they're infamous for extracting high payments from desperate customers and are not especially loyal to the Kingdom of Ire.

Guild of Cunning Commerce

A banking and foreign trade guild that is managed by the Remnant genius Sir Tariro Kureva. They mint a large number of alchemical coins and their vaults are guarded by large techno-magical golems.

> "Both known and unknown allies await us beyond our borders. Let us reach out through fire to grasp firm their outstretched and eager hands. Ire's greatest danger is not our many enemies, but our isolation. New friends, allies, trade and cooperation will be our salvation. Not magic, armies or sheer force of will."
>
> – Sir Tariro Kureva,
> Grand Master of the Guild of Cunning Commerce.



Kaltoran noble.

Illuminated Society

A guild that on the surface produces high-quality maps, books, scrolls and tomes through mundane and techno-magical printing presses. Their skilled artists are highly sought after, but this is all a cover for their true purpose; the liberation and resettlement of slaves from the Holy Kingdom of Catla, Drasong Clan and Southern Legion Tribes.

Manor of Spiritual Lusts

A curious guild of brothels that specializes in the satiation and healing of non-physical desires and ailments. Led by the (self-proclaimed) reformed demon of Dos; Isabella Black (not her true name). The guild is only found in cities and can be difficult to locate.

Techno-Spark Guild

They specialize in the invention and construction of techno-magical items and are hated by the Eternal priesthood as they teach the use of techno-magic without theology. The guild and the priesthood are at such odds that they have occasionally attacked one another. While the guild refuses to burn down Eternal temples, priests are more than happy to burn down guild workshops and warehouses.

Twin Sun Syndicate

A large guild that represents a range of raw-material industries, such as farming, logging and mining. In recent years they have moved into textiles, construction, general transportation and the production of industrial techno-magical equipment with the help of the Techno-Spark guild.

Unseen Society of Marvelous Wonderment

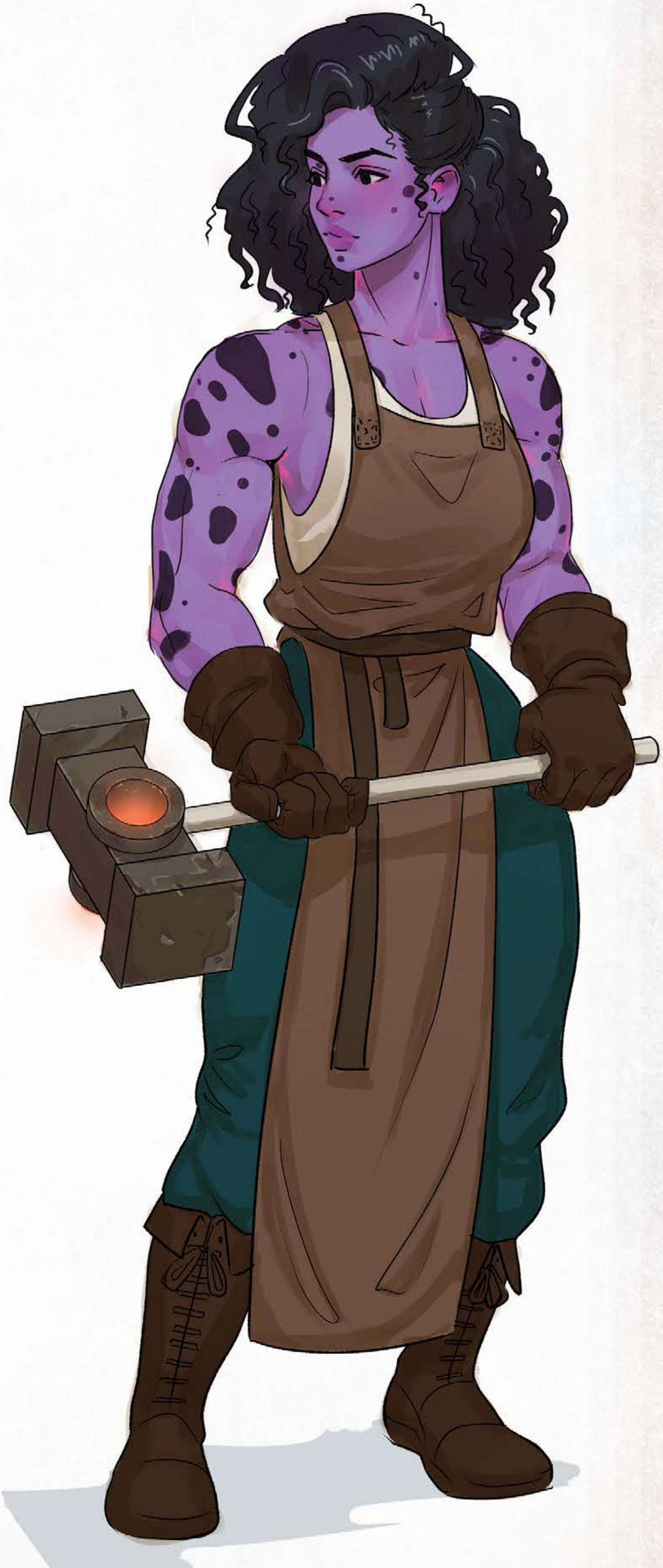
A guild of quirky scholars who specialize in the acquisition and identification of divine artefacts. Commonly hired by the Techno-Spark guild, Vanguard Order and the Eternal priesthood. The guild maintains a strong presence in the northern regions of the kingdom along the edge of the Twisted Forest.

Vanguard Order

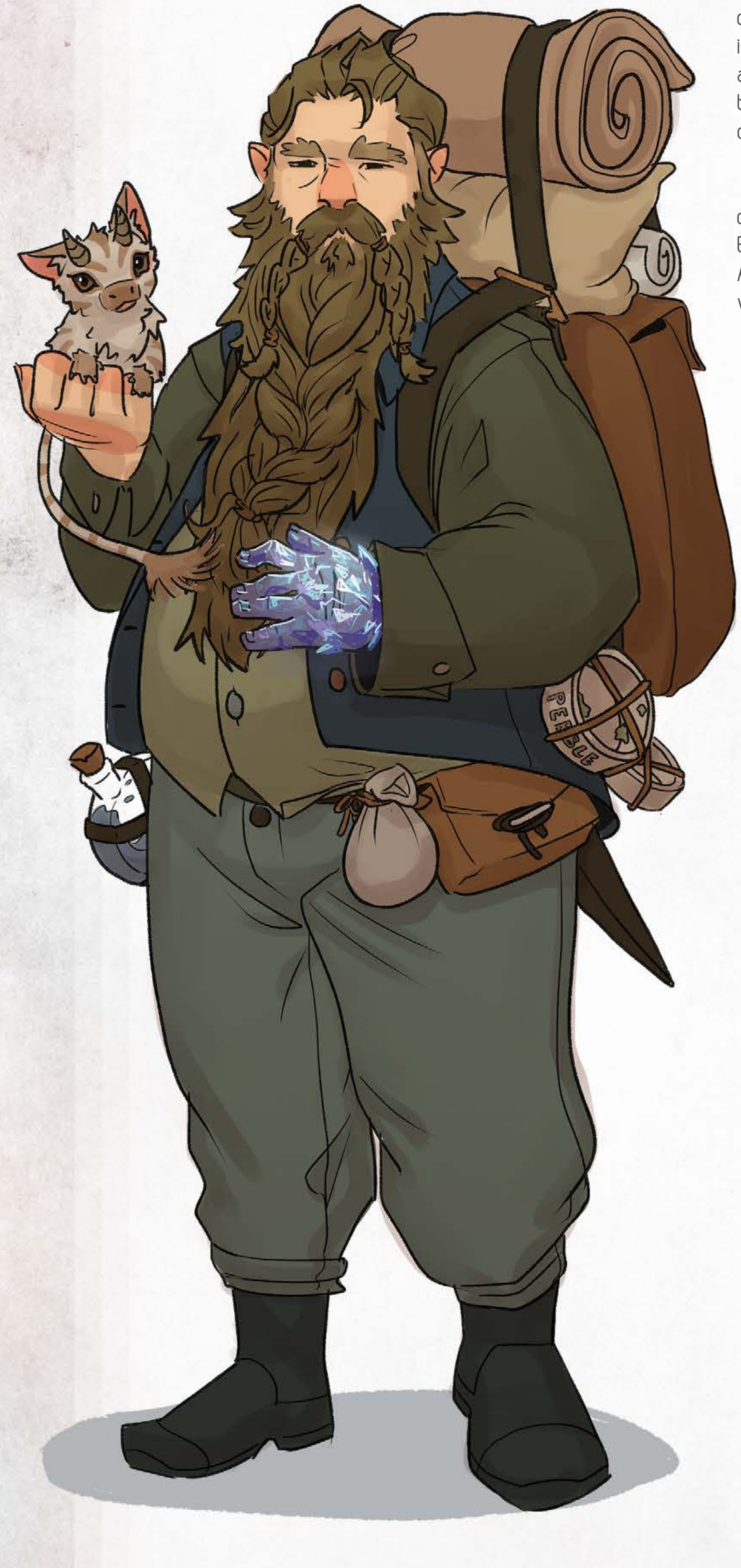
Named after an ancient order of monster hunters and explorers, this is the oldest of the guilds and is rumoured to have members and lodges across multiple nations and in a number of remote wilderness locations. Their affiliates are a mixture of idealists seeking adventure and jaded veterans who have lost many friends.

Zaelan Trade Guild

While they were not founded within Ire, this guild of the noble house of Zaelan from the Tarquinius Republic is well established within the land as they help to manage and defend the Prosperous Path trade route that connects the two nations. The house's boar-riding warriors are renowned for their skill, and they're always keen to hire sell swords.



Twi-Far blacksmith.



Creet merchant.

Robust Economy

Unlike its neighbour – the Holy Kingdom of Catla – the Kingdom of Ire has a decentralised economy and political structure. While it is unable to work as efficiently, raise as large an army or develop as many advanced industries, it is robust and swift to adapt. These two traits have allowed it to flourish while being surrounded by many dangers and enemies.

The high lords and ladies of Ire are each entrusted to secure their own land, failing to do so will see it removed from their control. Economic collapse will also see them stripped of titles and power. All understand that food and security for those under their rule are vital to their own prosperity.

- **Food:** Ire is a fertile realm that is a patchwork of farms, mills, hunting lodges and fishing docks. The Duchy of House Fordis is the breadbasket of the kingdom, along with the expansive Grand Duchy of House Tredeki. Despite their ongoing conflicts with Southern Legion raiders, House Rubis has a large fishing industry in the Sea of Signs.
- **Lumber:** The northern Twisted Forest provides more than enough lumber for the entire realm, supplying a steady income to the many lesser houses that are cutting the magical forest back for their new frontier settlements.
- **Magic:** Though Ire may not rival other nations in any single domain of magic, they have access to a greater variety of arcane powers. In the capital city of Kethwick, the gigantic Greatful Oak provides wylding while its techno-magic factories produce a steady flow of devices.
- **Ore:** The entire eastern mountain ranges and the southern hills of House Rubis are filled with ore. However, both regions are pressured by hostile forces.
- **Textiles:** House Tredeki is renowned for its large textile industry that make use of dyes from the lands of House Noskos, wool from House Fordis and silk from House Valdis.

Trade & Exploration

Ire has two dangerous trade routes that connect them to distant nations and wider Akharon: the meandering and long Prosperous Path through the northern Twisted Forest, and out to the Gale Sea through the southern Sea of Signs.

The Prosperous Path is regularly attacked by Drasong slavers from the Blood Stone Desert, forest monsters and occasionally even pirates from the Kraken isles. Though they have allies in the Tarquinius Republic who hold the other end of the trade route who are even more invested in its existence.

Ire lacks a strong military fleet to secure their seas from Southern Legion raiders and the arctic dragon Psychrosis, but a singular ship of skilled crew can succeed where a fleet would fail. More than a dozen ships have spent years at sea charting distant lands and gathering exotic goods, only to be destroyed or plundered meer days from Ire's harbours. The Holy Kingdom of Catla refuses to secure the Sea of Signs as they wish to see Ire locked out from the oceans.

Politics & the Regency Council

The noble houses of Ire are tasked with the duty of securing their land, defining their internal laws and ensuring all national taxes and troop levies are maintained. Universal laws and those of national interest are defined by the Regency Council; which was inspired by an ancient institute of the same name that governed Stronghold and Pol's Rest after the Druidic War before the formation of the Holy Kingdom of Catla.

King Noskos was an educated man during his youth and a mighty warrior throughout the civil war that formed the nation, but he quickly recognised that he was ill-equipped to govern as a traditional king. During his early years of rule he gathered together a group of wise advisors which evolved into the Council that now governs the land and interactions between high nobles.

There are seven High Seats within the council, one for each duchy of the kingdom, with supporting Low Seats given according to land size. Counties without representation can donate their citizenry count to a lord to boost their Low Seats. It is the responsibility of each High Seat holder to assign people to their supporting Low Seats, which have always gone to guild, religious or noble leaders.

High Seat Holders

- **King Hercule Noskos:** Twin blooded Legion-Remnant. Restrained, avoids factionalization and breaks political deadlocks.
- **Duke Adamis Fordis:** Kaltoran. Constantly pushing back against houses that demand their resources to defend Ire and supply their expansions into the Twisted Forest.
- **Duchess Elena Lagos:** Tolatl. Regularly scheming to increase the power of her House, and has many spies.
- **Duke Friedrich Rubis:** Legion. Favours those who demonstrate combat skill and piety towards the Eternal gods.
- **Vice Grand Duchess Safiya Tredeki:** Dracim. Working to maintain her legacy and House's land after her passing.
- **Duc Olivier Valdis:** Kaltoran. Content with the status quo.
- **Earl Tlaloc Badulf:** Tolatl. Represents a union of minor northern houses that are pushing against the Twisted Forest and slavers from the Blood Stone Desert.

> "The thud cow are Ogonjo's quiet blessing – milk for butter, cheese and cream; her strength to plough and pull; her dung to enrich the soil. Even in death, she feeds and clothes us. A humble creature, yet endlessly giving. Perhaps her quiet service can teach us more about life than all the noisy glories of men."
>
> – Fordis farmer.
>
> "Thud cows, we are cursed by the gods to be dependent on such beasts. A single foolish wolf or upset stomach can turn my barn into a crater as they explode like a bomb as a form of idiotic self-defence."
>
> – Lagos farmer.

Allies & Rivals

The Kingdom of Ire is surrounded by hostile nations and the monster-filled Twisted Forest. They are eager for economic and military allies, which have been found in the Tarquinius Republic, and the distant Twi-Far of Fari and Eyna.

Drasong Clan

Ire is at open war with the slavers of the Blood Stone Desert and commonly clash at the Bone Gate pass through the Deep Mountain ranges and along the Prosperous Path trade road. Clan warriors are extremely powerful and Ire is unable to pursue them into their desert home.

Eastern Twi-Far

Despite their great distance from one another, King Noskos has signed documents of peace with the Ember Sages of Fari and Eyna. They trade through the Tarquinius Republic and on rare occasions a magnificent Fari ship has made it all the way across the Gale Sea to Ire's shores.

Holy Kingdom of Catla

Catla are Ire's most significant political opponent. King Totec is eager to see King Noskos dead and his nation fragment into smaller domains that they can reabsorb. Despite their vast power, the Holy Kingdom will not declare open war as the divine intervention of Akh at the end of the civil war that created Ire has been interpreted as a command to not shed the blood of the masses. They also fear Ire's demigod king and his divine spear. The two nations maintain airs of civility and regularly trade both goods and spies with one another. Many suspect it is only a matter of time before war breaks out.

Kraken Isle Pirates

A distant foe, but the pirates of the Kraken Isle are dangerous enemies nonetheless. They occasionally raid Ire's northern trade path and regularly attack the Tarquinius Republic.

Southern Legion Tribes

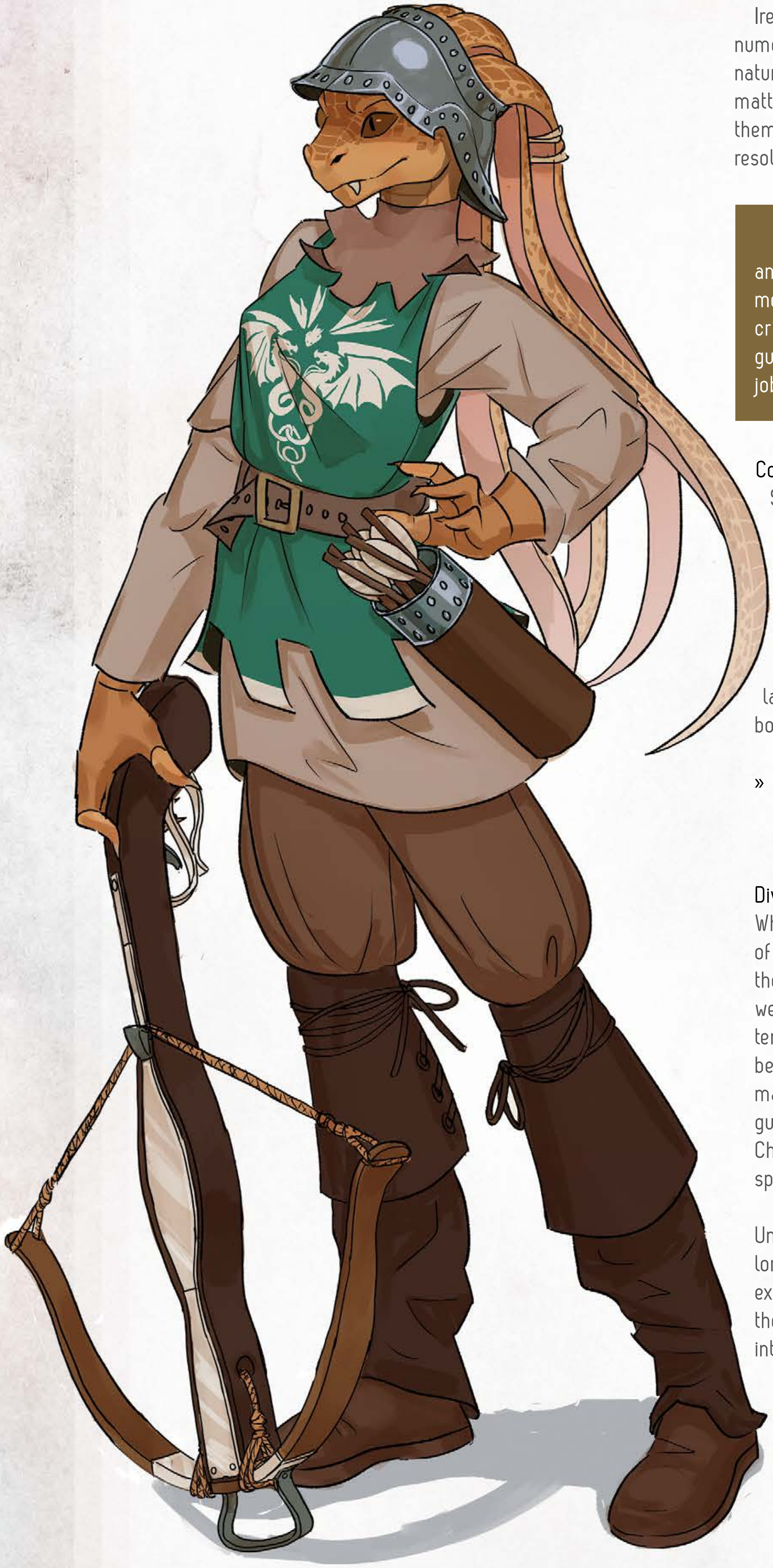
Ire most frequent rival, the Southern Tribes raid Ire's shores from their arctic homelands. They have no interest in claiming land; only in plunder, capturing thralls, and spilling blood in honor of the goddess Ath.

Tarquinius Republic

Ire's closest ally resides on the opposite coast of the continent and is connected by the meandering Prosperous Path trade route through the Twisted Forest. The Republic is a smaller nation but has greatly influenced the culture and politics of Ire, especially in the realm of guilds.

Warped Kingdom

Though Ire is not at open war with the dragon king Languorem, corrupting spores frequently flow over the Grave and Morass Mountains into Ire's realm; spawning monsters and destroying crops. It is thought by some that their shared enemy in the Drasong Clan is possibly keeping them both at bay.



Dracim arbalist

Threats & Opportunities

Ire is a large and strong kingdom that is being pressured by numerous threats from all sides and within. Their robust and diverse nature has allowed them to survive against the odds, but it is only a matter of time before powerful enemies and internal risks overwhelm them. If they are to survive they need to adapt, improve, expand and resolve threats.

Mercenaries (PCs!) play an important role within the economic and political ecosystems of Ire. They are regularly hired to fight monsters, defend settlements, explore ancient ruins, investigate crimes and transport goods. Nobles, religious organisations and guilds are ever-eager to recruit skilled agents who will get the job done!

Corrupting Magic

Spores from the dragon Languorem's Warped Kingdom and pockets of lingering wylding magic from the Druidic War are a dangerous threat if left unchecked. A single cluster of corruption can burrow into the ground, poison water sources, hatch Neph Spawn monsters, twist plants and attract evil druids. Remote and isolated mountains and forests need to be routinely scouted for signs of twisted life. Local leaders, land owners and guilds regularly place bounties on notice boards for their investigation and removal.

» **Truth:** The Nephilim developed many systems for destructively mutating flora and fauna into troops, resources and organic structures for their war efforts.

Divine Ruins & Servants

When the Eternal Gods freely walked Akharon at the dawn of the Age of Illumination they built grand complexes for themselves and their servants. Most no longer exist, but some were incorporated by the ancient Empire of Catla into their holy temples and fortresses, and many more were buried or built beneath the earth. The Druidic War entombed and unearthed many such sites, and they are commonly occupied by powerful guardians or nesting monsters, such as Angels of Ath/Akh, mad Children of Pol, relentless Automations of Dray/Corp, mysterious spirits, swarms of Chompers or fierce Neph Spawn.

Uncovered divine ruins within the land of Ire belong to the local lord or lady, and they are often quick to commission teams to explore and secure such sites and their treasures within before they are picked clean by robbers or unleash deadly monsters into their realm.

» **Truth:** Akharon has many ruined facilities, vehicle wrecks and ancient battlefields from multiple time periods. Human compounds, Archon laboratories, Mechonid temples, Nephilim nests and many settlements from the people of Haven. Nearly all of these have been affected by psionic nanites that have tweaked them to reflect Eternal god myths.

Eastern Drasong Slavers

Ire's eastern border is shielded by vast mountain ranges that spread from the frozen White Expanse to the top of the Blood Stone Desert. Over this natural barrier lies the slavers of the Drasong Clan who constantly raid the northeastern lands of Ire, especially through the Bone Gate pass. Levied forces push them back, but smaller teams are required to hunt down splinter groups seeking plunder and living chattel. While an army is unable to enter their realm, a small group of warriors who have braved their desert may be permitted to trade with the clan.

Escaped Slaves

Much to Ire's disgust, most of their neighbours make widespread use of slaves, and to their neighbour's displeasure, many within Ire are dedicated to abolishment of the practice. While escapes from the eastern Drasong Clan are uncommon, liberated slaves are trickling in through the porous borders of the western Holy Kingdom of Catla, and counter-raids are returning with liberated thralls from the Southern Legion Tribes.

Internal Struggles

Poverty, political instability, loose morals, feuding lords and displaced soldiers all contribute to a everpresent problem of banditry within the kingdom. All lords are willing to pay for the killing or capture of known outlaws, especially their leaders.

Petty tyrants are a more complicated issue within the nation, as the removal of an evil mayor or noble will require substantial evidence beyond the opinions of unhappy peasants. Ire may have been forged in civil war, but those in power are unwilling to destabilize their positions by allowing mob justice. Best to get the approval of a tyrant's master before their removal if you want to avoid being marked as a murderous criminal.

Northern Expansion

The Kingdom of Ire is expanding north into the dangerous and resource-rich Twisted Forest. The frontier colonies are desperate for help from those who can lead, study, explore and fight. Towns will often give positions of authority and influence to those who are willing to defend their homes and secure ancient resource-rich ruins and monster lairs.

The Holy Kindom of Catla is in competition for the Forest, but neither desires open war. They both understand that the nation that dominates these unclaimed lands will secure a significant strategic advantage. Both Ire and Catla aspire to push all the way north to the Gale Sea to pin the other in.

Countless druids, Fey, Chompers, Neph Spawn, Trolls, Wraiths and a whole range of dangers left over from the Druidic War stand in the way of everyone's plans. There may also be allies to be found; intelligent monsters that can be negotiated with, lost tribes who can be assimilated into the kingdom, and possibly even undescovered nations who have maintained a low profile. No one knows what's out there.

Prosperous Path

Twisted Forest monsters and Drasong slavers from the Blood Stone Desert regularly attack merchants travelling the precarious Prosperous Path from the Kingdom of Ire to the Tarquinius Republic. This trade route is important to both nations and their many guilds who all hire heavily armed and experienced guards to protect their interests.

Southern Seas & Legion Raiders

Ire does not currently have a military fleet large enough to secure their southern seas against tribal Legion raiders and the dragon Psychrosis. Lone ships of skilled crew are the only ones able to make it out to the vast Gale Sea and beyond, but this may change if enough political willpower can be brought to bear against the problem.

The shores of House Rubis are regularly beset by raiders from the Southern Legion Tribes. They arrive in swift longboats with large forces of mighty warriors to burn and pillage. Local lords are constantly demanding supplies from the central provinces and paying large forces of soldiers to secure their coast. The raiders have little interest in holding Ire's land, and they will quickly retreat or move on when a significant force is brought against them. House Rubis has even been known to pursue raiders all the way back to the frozen Southern Expanse.

Stronghold

The Warped Kingdom of the demigod dragon king Languorem holds the great fortress city of Stronghold to the southeast of Ire; a vital military chokepoint between the two nations and a vast repository of ancient magic. While Languorem and his Dracim armies have not openly attacked Ire, their corrupting spores, the occasional draconic monster (drake, wyvern, etc...) and small groups of Dracim bandits do travel over the mountains to cause trouble. These can also rile up the Elementals that live in the Grave and Morass Mountains.

» **Truth:** Languorem does not care for the Kingdom of Ire, but he does not tightly control his forces who will attack anyone.

Western Catla Rivalry

While the Holy Kingdom of Catla and the Kingdom of Ire are technically at peace, they are both constantly pushing against each other to gain political and economic advantages. Diplomatic manipulations, espionage, smuggling, trade taxes and even skirmishes are commonplace.

The Holy Kingdom is more powerful with a larger army and more advanced techno-magic, but they fear the demigod king of Ire and his divine spear. They are also compelled by the god Akh to not declare open war.

» **Truth:** The Holy kings are cunning and are willing to work over multiple generations. They hope for Ire to break apart so that they may be reabsorbed and the Empire of Catla reborn.

House Noskos

- **Ruler:** King Hercule Noskos (twin blood Legion-Remnant).
- **Capital:** Kethwick.
- **Subject Species:** All.
- **Cultural Notes:**
  - Their land belonged to House Catla before the civil war.
  - House Noskos is the Legion bloodline of King Hercule's father. his mother's family line is the Remnant minor House Kuzorora.
  - Most members of the House live on rural estates.
- **Legal Notes:**
  - King Hercule Noskos is old, has no biological children and has not named a heir.
- **Economic Strengths:**
  - Dyes, glass, fish, Dracim eggs, wylding, techno-magic.

"We lords and ladies are charged with the most sacred of duties – that of governance. Let this esteemed chamber be a beacon of justice and prosperity for our new kingdom. Speak boldly, act wisely, and serve selflessly, for the strength of the realm and future generations lies in our shared unity and wisdom. Together, we shall craft a future worthy of our people's hopes. May our endeavours bring honour to the gods, the country and the crown."

– King Hercule Noskos,
formation of the Regency Council.

Hercule Noskos was crowned king of Ire in the capital city of Kethwick following the civil war that formed the nation. He did not come from a noble bloodline but a middle-class family of scholars and merchants. The military leaders, priests and nobles made him their king as he was bonded to the divine spear Ire, popular with the people and had become a formidable military leader.

Hercule is seen as a warrior king by his people, not only for his deeds during the civil war but also due to his personal intervention when his lands have been threatened by Southern Legion raiders or draconic monsters from the corrupted city of Stronghold. The bards sing songs of his power, and it is said that his reputation alone is enough to secure the kingdom from their foes.

Over the past seventy years of the king's rule, the nation has flourished under his light-handed leadership and resistance to fictionalisation. Despite this, many members of House Noskos struggle to be accepted by the kingdom's aristocratic families, especially in the cities and among the old noble houses. Despite being the royal family, they are largely treated as rural nobles.

The land that they own once belonged to House Catla and was the heart of the old Holy Kingdom before the war. The Noskos' are not a large House and most of their members live in provincial estates. Noskos lords and ladies are typically steadfast, cool-headed, cautious thinkers and physically imposing. They have a gift for stewardship, learning and channel their Legion inner fire into hunting wild game and Neph Spawn. Their estates are universally well-managed, but they are not above corruption and vice. They are also well-equipped with techno-magical and wylding items that are developed in Kethwick. Their military levies and hunting parties are renowned for their regular use of firearms.

Many within the House have a reputation among the nobility for a lack of social refinement and rustic education. This is largely unearned and primarily stems from an uneasy caution and resentment of the family. The king is a fearsome figurehead who is considered an untouchable demigod, and the family may lose the crown after his death if the divine spear chooses a non-Noskos host.

King Hercule Noskos & Succession

The king is an old and wearied man, his life sustained by the pale bone-like divine spear Ire that has connected itself to him. Despite holding a power to rival the Archdruid and the dragon Languorem, Hercule has spent most of his life fighting off temptations of both detachment and the careless use of the power granted to him by the crown and spear. The king views restraint as his primary endeavour, a great virtue that all rulers are called to pursue and a trait that is almost impossible to regain once lost.

Despite outliving two queens and the assistance of skilled wylding wielders, the king's twin blooded nature – or the merging with Ire – has prevented him from having children. He believes that he will one day die, but has not yet openly chosen an heir or created a plan of succession. This has created an air of uncertainty around the crown, House Noskos and the future of the spear. The king could live for just two or two hundred years more, none can say when he will fall and what is to come after this event; for both the kingdom and his house.

Kethwick & the Grateful Oak

- See picture of Kethwick on Rule Book pg: 92.

The capital city of Kethwick is the jewel of the kingdom and the industrial, economic, political and spiritual heart of the nation. At the centre of its iconic hexagonal districts is the **Grateful Oak**, a gigantic wylding-created tree that was planted by the Archdruid during the Druidic War to provide his armies with arcane power. The tree no longer pulses with Neph's malevolence, but its roots spread throughout the city and far across the land; sapping up wylding to sustain itself and the appetite of the three dragon queens – **Frey**, **Hail** and **Gullv** (pg: 15) – that roost among her branches.

The dragon queens came to King Noskos seeking sanctuary from other dragons and healing from the Grareful Oak to prevent their transformation into wyverns. The dragon queens are a complex trio as they hold no offices of authority within the kingdom, but they are powerful, influential and not above playing politics for their own gain or amusement. They are also the biological mothers of most Dracim within the kingdom.

Nestled within the Grateful Oak is the **Sanctified Palace**: the residence of the king and offices of the **Regency Council** (pg: 69). It also houses a grand temple to the new goddesses Nijin and Jinin (pg: 190). The palace is an awe-inspiring structure of vine-covered white stone metal that is embedded into the great tree. Built long before the kingdom's founding by the Holy Kingdom of Catla, the palace holds countless secret chambers, many of which remain undiscovered to this day.

The palace teems with a vibrant array of courtiers and all manner of civil servants, creating an atmosphere buzzing with activity and importance. Within its grand halls and opulent chambers, guild representatives negotiate trade agreements, while religious leaders hold solemn ceremonies and advise on matters of spiritual significance. Every corner of the palace is filled with the hum of discussions, the rustle of fine fabrics and the dance of political intrigue.

Surrounding the palace and the oak are many large hexagonally walled districts that are built around central **megastructures**: temples, housing, guild halls, wylding-fueld farms and arcane academies. The city is well-known for its many techno-magical marvels, such as the lightning-powered lamps that line its streets, hovering carts, golem guards, long-distance communication booths and numerous arcane-enhanced workshops. Kethwick is significantly more technologically advanced than wider Ire and is a reflection of the ambitions and wealth of its creators.

The city is a melting pot of different people and cultures. All but the rarest of intelligent species – even many Wild Folk (pg: 38) – have communities here. People from all walks of life mix among the markets, workshops and thoroughfares during the day before returning home to enclaves that deeply reflect their personal culture and economic status.

The people of Kethwick often embrace exaggerated cultural markers of their species and ancestry. They fear a loss of identity to an indifferent city that is slowly and relentlessly melting away their heritage. In response, people might adopt embellished versions of their cultural traits, amplifying accents, customs or fashion that symbolize their background. Legion often wear armour in public, Creet may avoid touching all metals and Kaltorans often proudly display emblems of their family vocation.

> "Power does not corrupt: it reveals. Exposing the true nature of peasant and noble alike – be we beast or saint, fool or sage.
>
> I have glimpsed my reflection and I offer you the simplest of cloth to clothe my naked soul."
>
> – King Hercule Noskos,
> at the formation of the Regency Council.

Locations of Note

The lands of House Noskos are vast and varied. From the dangerous south to the fertile north, its people have learned to adapt to all manner of environments and threats.

Arcane Bay

Green wylding corruption flows thick and heavy from the dark fortress of Stronghold and the Warped Kingdom into the Arcane Bay. This would infect the coasts and seas of the realm with Neph Spawn and magical poison if it were not for the Grateful Oak's vast and thirsty roots that consume most of its power. The shores of the bay attract both tough fishermen and trainee wylding wielders, as schools of fish are plentiful and wylding can be harvested from the occasional monster or strange magical plant.

Citadel of Heaven

A short distance outside Kethwick and its surrounding farmland is the Citadel of Heaven: a large castle that was created long ago by House Catla as a means to siphon techno-magical power away from the Eternal priesthood. It is a labyrinthian structure whose lower dungeons have not been fully explored. House Catla locked it up during the civil war after they fled west, sealing their secrets behind traps and techno-magical guards.

Frostveil Peaks

The towering Frostveil Mountains stand as eternal sentinels at the realm's western point, where the king's lands converge with the Duchies of Fordis and Rubis. The surrounding towns brim with taverns and warehouses to accommodate the many merchants and supply caravans that move through the land. Here, Fordis' bountiful harvests, Rubis' rich ores and Noskos' refined goods flow thick. Due to the region's relative safety, the local guards are notoriously lax, their indolence as much a fixture of the region as the mountains themselves.

Grave Mountains

Those who dwell along the eastern Grave Mountains, which stand as a bulwark against the dragonkin of the Warped Kingdom, are a hardy and vigilant people who always have a notched blade within reach. While the wylding spores carried on the wind and enemy scout parties of Dracim warriors pose the occasional threat, there are far worse horrors that haunt these snow-capped mountains.

Ravenous stone elementals threaten to devour entire herds of thud cows unless repelled with fire. The most fearsome among them are large, cunning creatures that silently creep under the cover of night, masquerading as mere mounds of dirt and rock before they strike.

However, the greatest peril lies in the deranged metallic Children of Pol, whose arcane powers can melt unprepared warriors in a single flash. The Children are drawn to the corpse of their god beneath the valley of Pol's Rest, the city of Stronghold and the Grave Mountains.

Ice Wall

The southern lands of the realm below the Arcane Bay are inhabited by Legion farmers, hunters and fishermen who trace their lineage back to the Southern Tribes who claimed the region following the Druidic War. Their ancestors assimilated into the Holy Kingdom as the Tribes fragmented. They aided the rebellion that formed the Kingdom of Ire and are fiercely loyal to the crown, having spilled much blood to fend off southern raiders and would-be tyrants to secure their homes. Most within the Tribes refer to them as traitors or the lost **Tribe of the Ice Wall**. King Noskos holds them in high regard as he sees them as his kin and is thankful that they aided him in the recovery of the spear Ire in his youth.

The Ice Wall is a long and incomplete stone fortification that stretches out from the Tomb Forest toward the coast. It has been the project of countless local lords over many centuries, with sections tracing back to the early years of the ancient Empire of Catla. Every stone is placed in blood, as the Southern Tribes attack whenever the wall is repaired or expanded.

Oracle Keep

A new keep slowly grows block by block above the spray of surf and rainwater-etched cliffs of **Oracle Point**; a bastion of military power to project stability over a growing industrial town of docks, warehouses, factories, train stations and shrines to the goddess Corp. The Regency Council has ambitious plans for the fortress, hoping to use it as a cornerstone to seize control over the Sea of Signs from the Southern Legion Tribes.

Yet, to the council's dismay, whispers coil through the town like restless spirits. Rumors speak of cultists devoted to the goddess Nix, rising up in fierce opposition against the keep. Their anger is fueled by the desecration of sacred burial sites and the perceived usurpation of Nix by Corp.

Serpent Rivers

To the north, the Serpent Rivers converge into Neph's Bay, irrigating fertile lands that are well-traveled by merchants. Carts enjoy paved roads and frequent guard patrols as they transport raw materials to Kethwick and return with refined goods for the wider kingdom. These are lands of wealth where the Great Guilds rule and grand manors overlook peaceful waters.

Tomb Forest

The Tomb Forest is a realm where ancient white trees stretch their ghostly limbs towards the sky through perpetual mist. This is a forgotten and forlorn land that is home only to ancient nomadic Remnant tribes (ancestors of King Noskos' mother) who travel upon the backs of shaggy six-legged Umbral Yaks, wandering ghosts who lost their way within the forest and trickster fey who revel in mischief. The Tomb Forest has always stood alone, unclaimed, uncharted and unchanged since the dawn of creation. An isolated realm that cares not for the wider happenings of Akharon.

Threats & Opportunities

As the royal family and controllers of the nation's most advanced territory, House Noskos is no stranger to the dangers of power. In their hands rests the future of the Kingdom of Ire.

Beyond their King

King Noskos is a unique figure, a politically innovative demigod who is practically immune to assassination but not to the winds of change. Over time he has progressively delegated more of his authority to others, leading to a situation where the Kingdom of Ire is not governed by a single ruler but by a coalition of nobles, guild masters and religious leaders.

Should Noskos die or grow detach from mortal concerns, the kingdom may swiftly fracture and become a historical footnote as a failed experiment in decentralized rule. Alternatively, they could demonstrate that a multi-species, multi-religious society can hold firm. While most scholars anticipate the former, they remain hopeful for the latter.

Cult of the King

Though he has not openly encouraged it, the many stories around the king's immense power have sparked a zealous cult that reveres him as the God-King. This fervent faction is willing to lie, torture, kill and die for their interpretation of his will. Though few in number, their unwavering devotion drives them to relentlessly seek greater social and military influence. None can say what they would do if the king were to die.

Retake Bone Gate & Stronghold

Ire has two formidable eastern adversaries; the Drasong Clan slavers and the draconic Warped Kingdom. Both hold critical chokepoints that keep the Kingdom of Ire vulnerable. To secure these weaknesses, House Noskos must reclaim the twisted fortress city of Stronghold and aid their allies to take Bone Gate passage through the Deep Mountains.

House Tredeki and House Savas are currently focused on securing the Bone Gate, but the royal house have not yet moved against Stronghold. Such an action would necessitate waging war against the demigod dragon king Languorem, a risk they are reluctant to take.

Secure the Sea of Signs

Despite their extensive southern coast, the Kingdom of Ire possesses almost no naval power, allowing the Southern Legion Tribes and the Holy Kingdom of Catla to dominate the seas. If House Noskos can establish a series of dry docks around Oracle Keep they might curb the raides of the Southern Tribe and compete with the Holy Kingdom to establish distant colonies beyond the Sea of Signs.

To achieve this, they will need to transport quality lumber from the northern Twisted Forest, recruit skilled shipwrights from the Tarquinius Republic, train sailors, appease the fickle goddess Corp and raise significant amounts of gold.

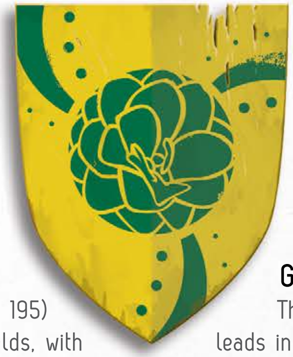
House Fordis

- **Ruler:** Duke Adamis Fordis (Kaltoran).
- **Capital:** Goldweal.
- **Subject Species:** Primarily Kaltoran and Legion.
- **Cultural Notes:**
  - Control the most peaceful and fertile lands within Ire.
  - Make use of large windmills that dot their landscape.
  - Traditional Ta'Di is the dominant religion.
  - Numerous seasonal festivals.
- **Economic Strengths:**
  - Animal (meat, leather, wool, etc...), grain.

"Spirits typically live in the forests, streams, caves, hills and places of untouched natural wonder. But here in the duchy of Fordis they find unique peace in the fields among the golden grains, gentle thud cows, great windmills and hardworking field hands. Let us show others what Akharon could be with numerous Seers and wise soothsayers to bridge the waters of mortal and spirit realms."

– Duke Adamis Fordis.

Holding only a barony under the Holy Kingdom, House Fordis grew to prominence during the civil war due to their passionate support of the rebellion. As Kaltorans, they and many of their people were practitioners of reformed Ta'Di, and were viewed with some suspicion for their dedication to the spirits of the land. This faith has increasingly changed back to traditional Ta'Di since the war, as those respected spirits were pivotal in not only their military successes but also in the rejuvenating of their land.



The great spirit stag Aharon the Life Giver (pg: 195) bounded across the acres of poisoned and burned fields, with woods, crops and fresh-water springs sprouting around his every hoof print. Angry spirits who had fought alongside the rebellion were calmed and returned to the earth to complete the rejuvenation of the realm. The entire duchy is now a tapestry of green fields, plump herds, golden crops, quaint towns and towering windmills. It is the bread and meat basket of the nation.

Some lords look upon the people of Fordis as weak and pampered, but those same lords are incredibly grateful when its wagons of produce come to feed their citizens. Fordis is the most peaceful land in the kingdom as it has a small external border that is easy to defend and a network of mercenaries and guilds to deal with the occasional internal monster or bandit.

The members of House Fordis tend to have naturally tanned skin, freckles and a blend of brown and red hair. Despite their people's strong connections to farming and the land, their bloodline has been aristocratic for centuries, tracing their ancestors all the way back to the Vanguards of Stronghold (pg: 69). They are skilled politicians, dancers, orators, archers and socialites. They also tend to have very large families that are attended to by armies of nannies, maids and servants.

The Fordis are experts at presentation and are gifted at remembering names and secrets. These skills have been well used in court to ensure that there are always other people fighting their battles and taking the fall for their mistakes.

Family Soothsayers are increasingly concerned about a troubling shadow within the bloodline – a subtle taint of fey bewitchment that has stolen away the ancestral memories of several children. Some suspect there are Elves hidden in the land who have led to illegitimate Kaltoran children. Despite their Ta'Di connections to the Fey, Witches are viewed by Fordis with caution and are only consulted in secret by suspicious parents.

Ta'Di Festivals

Every month within the land is marked by a large seasonal festival. These are typically celebrated through community or multi-generational family gatherings, large open markets, along with Ta'Di seers and soothsayers communing with local spirits to hear their fears and desires. It is not unusual for the ethereal spirits to openly fly about villages or small towns during these events.

Merchants regularly travel to the region during harvest festivals as the locals are eager to do business. Producers from neighbouring counties – especially the Creet from under House Crystalis and the Twi-Far from House Sooth – will travel in with their raw materials and handiwork for travelling merchants and idle aristocrats to sample.

Goldweal & Candle Lake

The capital of Goldweal is positioned on a short river that leads into Candle Lake, which in turn is connected to the Coral Gulf through a canal. Along the shores of the river, lake and sea are numerous fishing and boat-building villages and townships.

Goldweal is not a true city as it is primarily a castle that functions as a storehouse for the harvest of the land. It is in dire need of repair if it were to serve a military purpose, as its walls are crumbling with large trees jutting out of every corner. The true haven for House Fordis is a large island in the middle of Candle Lake where they have several homes and powerful spiritbound weapons (pg: 196) being held by loyal Seers and Soothsayers in case of emergency. The lake is also home to several dangerous water Elementals and tiny spirits that like to sing and are easily angered.

> "Ta'Di is a curiously adaptable religion that is able to pick and pass over its many ideas to allow itself to exist within almost any culture. Is this survivability a strength or a sign of hollow belief?"
>
> – Verex Firescale,
> thoughts on Reformed and Traditional Ta'Di.

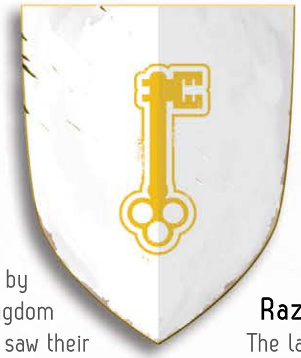
House Lagos

- **Ruler:** Duchess Elena Lagos (Tolatl).
- **Capital:** Razum.
- **Subject Species:** Primarily Tolatl.
- **Cultural Notes:**
  - Many pilgrims travel through their land to the temple of Akh's Hold and the fields of Akh's Line.
  - The city of Razum is home to many guilds.
- **Legal Notes:**
  - Land disputes with House Tredeki.
  - Open Worship of Dos is allowed.
- **Economic Strengths:** Banking, guilds, manuscripts.

"Our family has fallen on hard times as it has in the past. But take heart, for our seasons of glory are always longer and grander than our brief days in the shadows. It is up to us to return our House to those heights, for each summit is greater than previous peaks."

– Duchess Elena Lagos,
to her newly initiated grandson.

The ancient House of Lagos has a reputation for cunning, ambition and political manipulation. It was their House that handed the northern continent to the ancient Empire through betrayal, and it was they who orchestrated House Catla to be the puppet monarchs of the Kingdom of Catla following the Druidic War. For almost a century they ruled the Kingdom from the shadows, until House Catla seized control through techno-magical dominance.



Lagos was planning for the fall of House Catla by secretly arming a slave uprising to destabalize the kingdom through civil war. With the rise of Hercule Noskos they saw their chance, and fueled the fires of resistence. They did not expect the rebellion to win, for Noskos to be crowned king of a new nation, or for the gods themselves to become involved.

When the dust settled they were hailed as champions of the oppressed for their long support of the revolution. In public and the royal courts they smile and play the role of humble heroes. In private they seethed, for they had lost half their land to House Burdragon from the Holy Kingdom of Catla and were even further from true power.

The members of this House tend to be well-educated, proud and cruel. Most believe themselves to also be intelligent and charming, but those gifts are not universal. Talented members of the family are identified at a young age and ushered into a secret inner circle in the city of Razum where they receive special education in social manipulation, techno-magic, combat and the Eternal gods. Untalented members of the family are groomed for appearance so that they may be married off as political chips for influence. The occasional youth has rejected this dichotomy and travelled far from their homeland to make their own way in life, often in the northern frontier settlements of the Twisted Forest.

Pilgrims, Akh's Hold & Akh's Line

The civil war that created the Kingdom of Ire ended when the sun god Akh sundered the fields of battle between the two armies with a beam of golden light from a flying metal chariot. Those fields and the border between the two nations are now known as Akh's Line and attract hundreds of pilgrims each day from both nations.

At the southern end of the line is the **Akh's Hold** temple that watches over the border. Inside are many holy relics of both Akh and his wife Corp, including the remains of a metal chariot that was similar to the one seen on that fateful day. The entire region is officially demilitarized, but both nations have stationed many combat-trained priests to secure their lands.

Land Disputes

A long difficulty between House Lagos and House Tredeki is the disputed ownership of their borderlands. House Lagos owned the counties long before the civil war, but they were taken by House Catla and later given by King Noskos to Tredeki after the founding of Ire. Tensions have escalated to the point of open battle between regional lords. The two great houses are not technically at war, but they are using the conflict between their vassals as a proxy to settle a range of land and economic disagreements.

Those loyal to House Lagos are likely to win the conflict on the ground and in the courts, but outcomes will change if the dispute escalates to include more regional lords.

Razum

The large city of Razum is majestic to behold, as its towering white structures line the many cliffs of the glittering inland Crystal Sea that is fed by nearby waterfall-dotted rivers from the Eternal Mountains. The inner city is built exclusively for Tolatl, with small doors that lead into grand high-roofed rooms. The only standard-sized doors are in the rear for servants.

The inner district is almost exclusively noble residence now, with the surrounding **Ring District** accommodating the city's many businesses and guild halls. House Lagos claims ownership over the Crystal Sea, but they have allowed limited fishing by the Holy Kingdom of Catla. Smugglers regularly use the waterway to travel between the two nations, exploiting the rampant corruption within the Holy Kingdom and granting their services to Lagos spies.

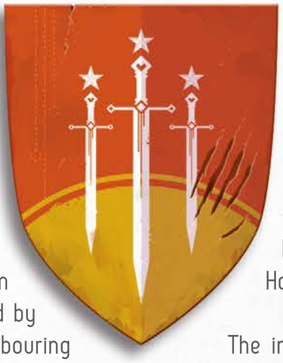
The three most notable buildings within Razum are the towering **White Rock Citadel** which is home to Duchess Elena Lagos, the grand techno-magical bank of the **Guild of Cunning Commerce**, and the underground maze of the **Manor of Spiritual Lusts** which is beneath the estate of Isabella Black the reformed demonette of Dos. Razum is the only city where the evil god Dos is allowed to be openly worshipped; as they claim that ignoring a god – such as they did with Neph – will inevitably lead to destruction.

House Rubis

- **Ruler:** Duke Friedrich Rubis (Legion).
- **Capital:** Dignitas.
- **Subject Species:** Primarily Legion.
- **Cultural Notes:**
  - Devoute followers of the Eternal gods.
  - Regularly attacked by Southern Legion raiders.
  - Minor cultural apprehension towards non-Eternal religions.
- **Legal Notes:**
  - Some regions are currently held by Southern Legion raiders who have settled in to raid deeper into the duchy.
- **Economic Strengths:** Fish, mercenaries, ore.

> "Righteousness is our sword, scorn our armour and piety our shield! Let us root out the tyrant, the infidel and the beast. We are the clenched fist of the goddess! Bulwarks of justice!"
>
> – Duke Friedrich Rubis,
> before the battle of Sanctity Hill.

House Rubis has a long and glory-filled history of holy warriors. They were the ancient Empire's sword of the north and the wardens of the ancient Whispering Jungle that gave rise to the Archdruid. For the Kingdom of Ire they are tireless guardians, protecting the nation from relentless Southern Legion raiders.



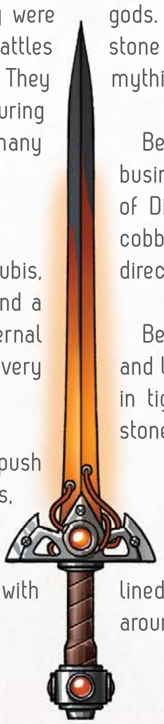
Their lands are surrounded by the Sea of Signs and pocketed by ore-rich hills that are topped by palisaded villages. The duchy is a large producer of minerals as the eastern mountain ranges are too dangerous to effectively work. Raw ores are extracted from techno-magically drilled mines before being transported by simple carts to warehouses where it is moved on to neighbouring regions for refinement.

House Rubis would be significantly more prosperous if they were able to refine and work this ore themselves, but their constant battles with raiders make it hard to invest in the required infrastructure. They are also forced to acquire large amounts of grain from neighbouring House Fordis to supplement produce from their people's many shepherds and fishermen.

Holy Friedrich Rubis

At the heart of the House is the patriarch Duke Friedrich Rubis, a stoute Legion with a grizzled beard, arms like tree trunks and a soul as solid as a mountain. He is a devout follower of the Eternal gods and never forgets to make offerings to them before every endeavour. He is especially mindful of the goddess Jop Jop.

The Duke is a skilled warrior and regularly leads forces to push back invading raiders. He also loves to recite ancient sagas, and encourages his family to pursue education and martial excellence. Friedrich's sense of right and wrong can be overly simplistic and harsh at times, and has caused enmity with many who do not wish to walk a path so pure.



The Radiant

Modelled after a mythic sword from their history, House Rubis may gift a special techno-magical weapon known as a **Radiant Blade** to a devout warrior who has dedicated themselves to Jop Jop and performed a great deed. Each weapon is custom-made for its user and is typically a sword, axe or spear. They may also be given to mercenaries and those from outside their realm who have shown themselves to be worthy.

These **Radiant Knights** are slowly gaining a reputation within the Kingdom of Ire and abroad for their martial skill, moral fortitude and hatred of injustice. They typically use a range of techno-magical tools and armour, and are fond of direct confrontations. There are rumours of Dos corrupting the hearts of several Radiant warriors, turning them into **Gloom Knights**; a twisted dark mirror of their former selves.

- Radiant Blades have the Arcane Blast Modification, and will lose this Modification if they're used by a person that they were not made for.

Dignitas

The city of Dignitas resides within a bay off the Sea of Signs, has three rings of walls and is guarded by a large and experienced army. Built during the early years of the Holy Kingdom, the fortress city has rebuffed multiple forces of aquatic Neph Spawn, the giant hydra of Dos and a Southern Legion siege. All have broken against the walls of the city and might of House Rubis.

The inner stone walls of the city are the largest, and house the religious and upper-class districts. While All-Faith and Ta'Di temples are present, they're dwarfed by structures to the Eternal gods. Especially the **Cathedral of Furious Justice** to Jop Jop, a grand stone building that houses a splinter of wood from the goddess' mythic club and the workshops used to create Radiant Blades.

Between the inner and second stone walls of the city are the business, port and middle-class districts. This is the working heart of Dignitas and is famous for its well-armed city watch, narrow cobbled streets and numerous underground water roads that lead directly into key buildings.

Between the second and outer walls are the warehouse, military and lower-class districts. Wooden houses are built atop one another in tight clusters around the edges of military training fields and stone warehouses with tall lofts.

Beyond the outer walls are large swaths of farmlands that are dotted with small clusters of rural homes, inns and animal pens. The long walls are a mixture of stone and wood, and are lined by a sea-fed moat that doubles as a highway for small boats around the edge of the city.

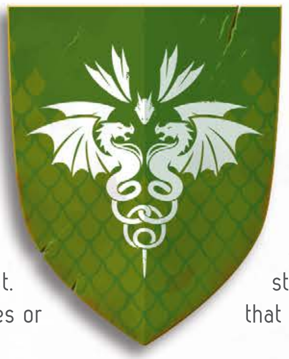
House Tredeki

- See Dracim write-up from pg: 12.

- **Ruler:** Vice Grand Duchess Safiya Tredeki (Dracim).
- **Capital:** Smok.
- **Subject Species:** Primarily Creet, Dracim and Remnant.
- **Cultural Notes:**
  - Large region with many species-based cultures.
  - Creet primarily live in the north, Remnant in the urban south, Dracim in the central and eastern regions.
  - All-Faith is a growing religion.
- **Legal Notes:**
  - Land disputes with House Lagos.
  - Regular battles with Drasong slavers.
- **Economic Strengths:** Food, textiles.

"In our land where swords sing and shadows weave secrets, power is the prize of the bold. To secure lordship is to master more than land – it's to balance loyalty and treachery, steel and wit. The crown gleams, but its weight is borne in blood and whispered oaths. Some rise with honour, others through darker means. Ultimately, only those who grasp fate's ever-turning wheel will carve their names into the stones of history."

– Vice Grand Duchess Safiya Tredeki,
to her children.



The grand duchy of House Tredeki is a large and sprawling region of Ire with a range of cultures and environments. It was taken from a number of loyalist lords during the civil war and given to former lowborns who had distinguished themselves throughout the conflict. Many of the ancestors of those who live here were slaves or religiously oppressed by the Holy Kingdom of Catla.

The title of Vice Grand Duchess of this land is an appointed position that is given by the King of Ire. Safiya Tredeki was a Countess before she was elevated to replace the previous Vice Grand Duke who had mismanaged the land. Many in court expect the province to split after Safiya retires; most likely into two duchies with some portioned off to join a new northern duchy. This would significantly reduce the power of House Tredeki and numerous nobles are working to avoid or ensure this path.

Unlike many of their Dracim species, no Tredeki for two generations has been born from the three dragon queens from Kethwick. They are all born and raised by Dracim parents who have produced their own small eggs, though many of these parents who have married into the family were born of Dragon queens. The family coat of arms depicts the three royal dragons, honouring them for their service to the Dracim of Ire, and acknowledging that the first members of their House were birthed by them without connection to the evil dragon king Languorem.

Members of the Tredeki family have a noble countenance, firm sense of duty, keen minds and vibrant scales. They are skilled orators and leaders but are struggling to manage tensions between the many cultures and faiths of their people. The family itself is religiously split with some members – including Vice Grand Duchess Safiya's husband – turning from the Eternal gods to the All-Faith. Many nobles look down upon the All-Faith as a religion for peasants, outcasts, the destitute and other lowborns.

Bone Gate Slavers

The iconic crescent-shaped Moonshadow Mountains overlook a turbulent region of battle. The Bone Gate, is a path through the eastern Deep Mountain range that grants Drasong slavers access to the duchy to pillage their goods and steal away their people. House Tredeki, along with allies from House Savas, have struggled to push the raiders back as every meter must be purchased with blood.

The Drasong know the mountainous region and have many secret paths and tunnels to trick, misdirect, ambush and circumvent their foes. For Tredeki and Savas to ever gain victory they must reduce the size of their front by pushing all the way to the Bone Gate pass. If the Drasong are ever forced back to this point they are sure to retaliate in force.

Urbanized South

As the centre of the Kingdom of Ire, the southern regions of the duchy are considerably more urbanized than other counties. These large towns are primarily occupied by Remnant, and cater to significant merchant and resource hauler traffic. Their streets are well-maintained and lined with inns, blacksmiths, stables, guild halls, and techno-magical street lamps that flicker and buzz with captured lightning.

Smok

The capital city of Smok is built around a rare divine ruin of the goddess Nix from the Age of Illumination. The grand **Chamber Temple** was placed over a small crack in a rock that leads into an underground cavern that is lined with artefacts dedicated to the goddess of the afterlife, tricks and enchantment. The ruin and temple were both damaged during the civil war, and funds from pilgrims are being used to repair what can be fixed.

The city was largely destroyed during the uprising when slaves burned it to the ground and slaughtered its inhabitants. The bones of those killed were buried by priestesses of Nix alongside the Chamber Temple. Beyond this central holy site, the city proper has a simple wooden wall and sits within the shadow of the partially reconstructed **Claw Castle** that houses the Tredeki family.

The city is primarily occupied by Dracim and a smattering of Creet. Both of these species share a complicated history of abuse from gods, demigods and civilisation. They also have unique physiologies and diets. This makes Smok a culturally complex city with many tensions as its people are slowly finding their place within the world over multiple generations.

House Valdis

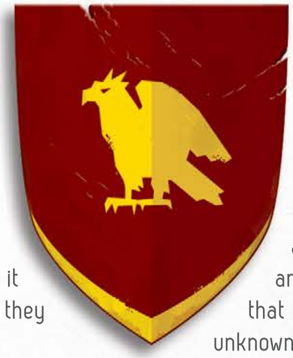
- **Ruler:** Duc Olivier Valdis (Kaltoran).
- **Capital:** Valeur.
- **Subject Species:** Primarily Kaltoran.
- **Cultural Notes:**
  - Small middle and merchant class.
  - Many small villages and few towns.
  - Strong ties to tradition.
  - Prefer alchemy over techno-magic.
  - Reformed Ta'Di is the dominant religion.
- **Economic Strengths:** Alchemy, perfumes, silk, beer, wine.

"Well-earned pride is a quiet, steadfast thing – woven from battles won, scars earned and dreams realized. It needs no audience, for its only witness is the soul it strengthens."

– Seigneur Mathieu Valdis,
in discussion with Duc Olivier Valdis.

It is difficult not to respect House Valdis as they excel in all that they do. Their Red Chevalier knights are skilled and brave, their lords wealthy and intelligent, and their people prosper in peaceful lands of grape farms and pristine mountains. Dating back to the very foundation of the Empire of Catla they have always been the paragons of ability. They are better than everyone else and they know it.

House Validis was late to join the civil war that formed the Kingdom of Ire. Their slaves did not rebel as they were well-managed and isolated by their land's many mountains. The House and their vassals joined the rebellion just before the end of the conflict, it is not known if they had always planned to do so or if they had cunningly deduced who would win.



The Duchy of Valdis is a land out of time with many quaint villages, few techno-magical devices and almost no guild presence. There is also a greater divide between the nobility and the lowest class as there is almost no middle merchant class. The realm is peaceful and content, but the lives of their serfs are almost unchanged from when they were slaves. The lords own all of the land, hold all of the wealth and are the only ones with an education. House Valdis are so capable, content and free from external pressure that they see no reason to fix what they do not see as broken.

Many Feuds

The members of House Valdis spend much of their time in leisure. Parties, tournaments, hunting, reading, art and poking fun at rivals are all common pastimes. They have a famous feud with the ancient House of Burdragon from the Holy Kingdom, but also with many other noble families that they look down upon with contempt.

Many within the House are bullies in their own way. Not through muscle and open mockery, but through their intellect, quick wit and social manipulation. They take great pleasure in making others look the fool while they appear the hero.

Red Chevaliers

The flightless bird (Galeflappers) riding Red Chevalier knights are famous accross the continent of Catlan for their chivalric virtues. All are trained from a young age in the Stormcrown Mountains, starting out as a worker in a aviary before becoming a squire to a Chevalier. Once granted knighthood they are expected to spend a portion of each year in the Morass and Deep Mountains fighting Neph Spawn and Dracim from the Warped Kingdom. Many come down from the mountains to participate in tournoments during the summer.

Old Ways & Red Lightning

House Valdis and their people are dedicated to tradition and the old ways of doing things. New ideas and methods regularly seek to pierce this cultural bubble, but it is hard to fight against many generations of reinforced Kaltoran ancestral memories. This is particularly notable in their preference for traditional alchemy over modern techno-magic.

The Kaltoran alchemists of the land are among the best in Akharon, and are particularly gifted in the creation of potions, perfumes and wine. They are also renowned for their iconic Red Lightning-infused weapons that mix fire with the power of storms.

Valeur

The ancient city of Valeur sits at the base of a mountain that feeds the great Serpent Rivers. Its many keeps, walls, towers and buildings wind and weave around natural cliffs and streams. Green creeper vines and vibrant flowers line five-hundred-year-old stone walls that were placed before the ancient Empire of Catla by an unknown culture. The Druidic War destroyed half of the city when it created the nearby mountains, but many buildings were left intact as the citizens had already fled to Stronghold. With the help of slaves and great wealth, House Valdis' ancestors restored the city and have taken it beyond its past glory.

Six small keeps dominate the skyline, each one occupied by a large Valdis family and their many servants. Between these structures are the two tournament grounds – **Bague** and **Grand Haut** – that attract knights, combatants, performers and travellers from across Ire.

Further up the mountain are numerous aviaries that grow and care for a wide range of working birds. From small messenger creatures to the great Galeflappers mounts of Red Chevaliers. The most famous of these is the **Plume Parfaite** which grows birds for House Valdis and sale to distant nobles.

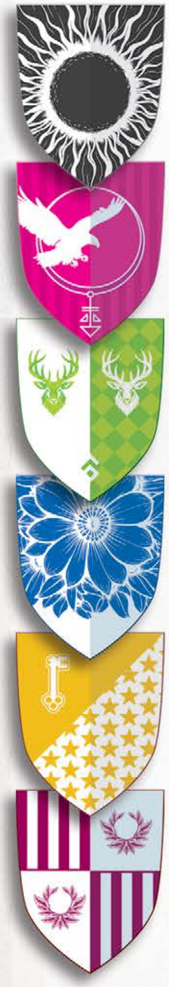
Outside of the city are the many wooden workshops of the **Alchemical District**, each one designed to collapse in the event of fire or explosion. Rarely a day goes by without a great pillar of coloured smoke rising into the air, or a month without an explosion that is heard across Valeur. Alchemy is a respected vocation, as their work is dangerous and brings in much wealth.

Example Minor Houses

Within the Kingdom of Ire, tens of thousands of noble families exist, each with unique compositions and varying social standings. The highest ranks – such as dukes, counts and barons – were typically ancient hereditary titles passed down within a family from before the civil war. 'Lesser' and 'petty noble' titles are also commonly hereditary but may have been gained through acts of service to the kingdom, such as knighthood, financial contributions, great deeds during the civil war or the securing of new land from the northern Twisted Forest.

Lesser nobles typically govern smaller estates, such as castles, manors, or smaller tracts of land, and often serve as vassals to higher lords. Although their status and influence are considerably lower than that of the high nobility, they still enjoy privileges and rights beyond the reach of commoners.

These lower-ranked nobles often maintain retinues of guards and servants and administer justice and governance within their own estates. They often rely on the produce and labour of their lands and the support of their own vassals and tenants to sustain their livelihoods. They form a crucial middle layer within the nobility, between the highest-ranking peers and the middle class of Ire.



Ater

- **Ruler**: Earl Faustus Ater (Legion).
- **Capital**: Adlerfeste.
- **Subject Species**: Primarily Legion.

Dukhil

- **Ruler**: Baron Jarek Dukhil (Twi-Far).
- **Capital**: Sparrowhurst.
- **Subject Species**: Primarily Twi-Far.

Egali

- **Ruler**: Countess Alice Egali (Kaltoran).
- **Capital**: Brindleford.
- **Subject Species**: Primarily Kaltoran.

Joli

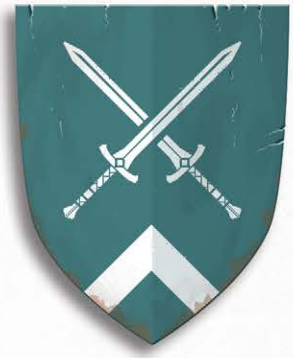
- **Ruler**: Earl Wulfric Joli (Kaltoran).
- **Capital**: New Ockington.
- **Subject Species**: All.

Potencia

- **Ruler**: Earl Lope Potencia (Tolatl).
- **Capital**: Torre Del Alba.
- **Subject Species**: Primarily Tolatl.

Unhu

- **Ruler**: Baroness Amai Unhu (Remnant).
- **Capital**: Elmswood.
- **Subject Species**: Primarily Kaltoran.

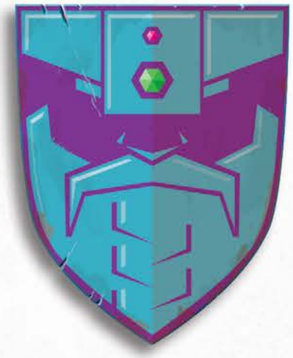


Badulf

- **Ruler**: Earl Tlaloc Badulf (Tolatl).
- **Capital**: Mara.
- **Subject Species**:
  - Primarily Tolatl and Remnant.
- **Cultural Notes**:
  - Close to House Zaelan.
  - Value combat skill.
- **Economic Strengths**
  - Trade (by the Prosperous Path to the Tarquinius Republic)

House Badulf is an oddity among the Tolatl houses, as they emphasize personal martial skill and physical ability. All Badulf children are trained in both sword and bow from a young age and are taught to always carry a secret blade. The Badulf fighting style seeks to maximise the advantages of their small stature and agility while exploiting their opponent's size and any delusions of so-called 'honourable combat' that they may hold.

Earl Tlaloc Badulf represents the smaller northern realms on the Regency Council. He is respected for his martial victories and the creation of **The Prosperous Path** trade route to the eastern Tarquinius Republic. However, he is easily angered and has struggled to cultivate non-northern political allies on the Council.

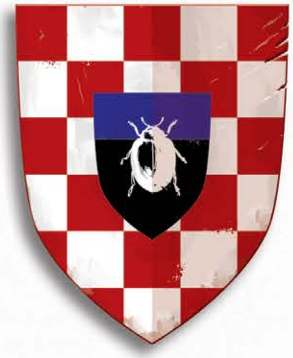


Crystalis

- **Ruler**: Earl Sven Crystalis (Creet).
- **Capital**: Hellir.
- **Subject Species**: Primarily Creet.
- **Cultural Notes**:
  - Mix of Ashen and Verdant Creet.
  - Have embrace some non-Creet cultural traits; such as not being fearful of gods.
- **Economic Strengths**:
  - Stone, wood crafting.

The founders of the Creet House of Crystalis were slaves under House Lagos and are responsible for hiding thousands of their liberated kin in the county that is now their land to rule. The Crimson Crest mountain range dominates their southern lands while small forests pepper the north.

Many Creet – especially those of the Ashen nation – travelled back to their ancestral homelands after the civil war, but those of this region have accepted their new home and have embraced much of its culture. They still prefer to live in semi-subterranean dwellings and work with stone and wood, but they are less fearful of the gods, have embraced some techno-magic and have started to use family names in place of the traditional patronymic style. They are creating a new Creet cultural nation within the Kingdom of Ire that is known as the Unveiled Creet.

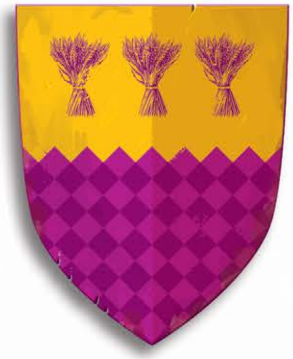


Kudya

- **Ruler:**
  - Viscount Farai Kudya (Remnant).
- **Capital:** Kutadza.
- **Subject Species:** Primarily Remnant.
- **Legal Notes:**
  - Land is offered to frontier settlers within the Twisted Forest.
- **Economic Strengths:**
  - Lumber, pottery, artefacts.

The Kudya family were lords of a small county when they joined the rebellion against the Holy Kingdom of Catla, and they now rule a large barony by extracting land from the Twisted Forest. New frontier settlements are attempted every year, offering land and opportunity to those who can secure it for Viscount Farai Kudya.

Farai is an extremely ambitious man who is eager to secure as much of the Twisted Forest as he can, racing against his neighbouring lords and the Holy Kingdom. He funds these endeavours through the sale of lumber, pottery and artefacts from the dangerous forest. He is also lax with support for these fledgling villages, bringing in settlers from distant counties and preferring to retry in new locations over sinking resources into a failing settlement.

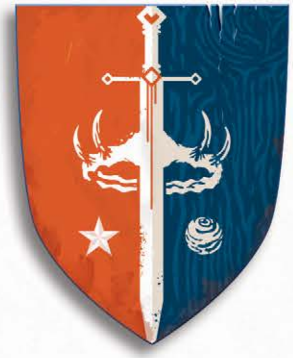


Sadeh

- **Ruler:**
  - Baron Amos Sadeh (Kaltoran).
- **Capital:** Ai-Sheaf.
- **Subject Species:** Primarily Kaltoran.
- **Cultural Notes:**
  - Beer is culturaly significant.
  - Week-long religious festivals.
- **Economic Strengths:** Beer.

The House of Sadeh controls a barony and are vassals of House Valdis. While much of the duchy enjoys wine, the people of this region have a long history of appreciation for beer. This is reinforced by their multi-generational Kaltoran farmers, alchemical breweries and week-long religious festivals.

The members of Sedah are rural nobles who spend much of their time and effort on issues of farming, land and the administration of small-town justice. The Deep Mountains stretch across their entire eastern border and are patrolled by a mixture of Red Chevalier knights and men-at-arms. Few enemies make it across the inhospitable mountains, but outbreaks of corruption from Warped Kingdom spores do require House Sedah to occasionally destroy crops and hire mercenaries to slay dire beast or Neph Spawn that are threatening their people.

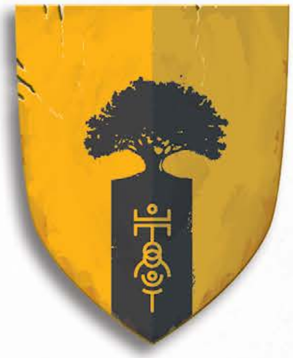


Savas

- **Ruler:**
  - Marquess Wilhelm Savas (Legion).
- **Capital:** Dunkelwald.
- **Subject Species:** Primarily Legion.
- **Cultural Notes:**
  - Regularly assist neighbours to fight back Drasong slavers.
  - Issues with bandits.
- **Economic Strengths:**
  - Refined ore, stone.

The sturdy House of Savas can trace its lineage back to both the great House of Rubis and the distant Southern Legion king of Romanos (pg: 153). They are often looked down upon by courtly nobles as uncultured, but they are greatly appreciated by their neighbours who they regularly defend against Drasong slavers and roaming monsters.

Savas share a small border with the Blood Stone Desert, but it is defended by experienced guards and a great wall that is being constructed between the Deep Mountains and the Starfall Peaks. The House has secured portions of these mountains to mine ore, which they refine and send south. Bandits are a growing issue within the region as Savas lords and ladies are increasingly neglecting the needs of their peasants for the glory of combat.



Sooth

- **Ruler:** Earl Mateo Sooth (Twi-Far).
- **Capital:** Astero.
- **Subject Species:** Primarily Twi-Far.
- **Cultural Notes:**
  - Traditional and reformed Ta'Di are the dominant religions.
  - Contrasting culture between heavy industry and harmony with nature.
- **Economic Strengths:** Metalcraft.

Following the civil war, many Twi-Far were eager to have their own land within the newly created Kingdom of Ire. This was contentious as they were not enslaved like other species and were not particularly known for their contributions to the rebellion as their Ta'Di religion inclined them towards neutrality. King Hercule Noskos was generous and followed the model of House Crystalis by giving the Twi-Far noble family of Sooth a densely forested region in the centre of Ire to rule.

In exchange for this gift the Twi-Far blacksmiths of this region are required to produce a wide range of metal and techno-magical components from ore provided by House Rubis. The Twi-Far towns are now living in two worlds: one of industry, metal, smoke and fire, and the other of nature, spirits, harmony, seers and soothsayers.

Holy Kingdom of Catla

- See Celestis write-up from pg: 110.

- **Ruler**: King Totec Catla the 4th (Tolatl).
- **Capital**: Celestis.
- **Cultural Notes**:
  - Nation was formed from descendants of the Empire of Catla who emerged from Pol's Rest after the Druidic War.
  - Emphasis on order, prosperity and centralized authority.
  - Dominated by the Eternal religion.
    - Especially prejudiced against the All-Being, Dos and Neph.
  - Upper class are primarily Tolatl.
  - Slavery is common.
    - Especially of Creet, Dracim and Remnant.
  - Kingdom is split into four realms: Central Passage, Colonies, Eastern Borderland and the Western Arm.
- **Legal Notes**:
  - Robust judicial system with Arbiter priests, hearings, investigations and harsh punishments.
  - Family heirs are selected.
- **Economic Strengths**:
  - Labour (slaves), ore, salt, techno-magic.

"We are the guardians of civilisation, knowledge, wisdom and progress. Ignorance and the foolish will of the masses are the two great enemies that threaten to return us to the Age of Darkness. To an Age of Neph."

– Arbiter Rosa Libro,
Your Betters Rule, Vol IV, page 146.

The lords of the Holy Kingdom see their nation as the reborn ancient Empire of Catla that once ruled the continents of both Catlan and the Whispering. They are chosen by the gods to carry the flame of progress and civilisation, to tame the world and unite all people under their divine wisdom.

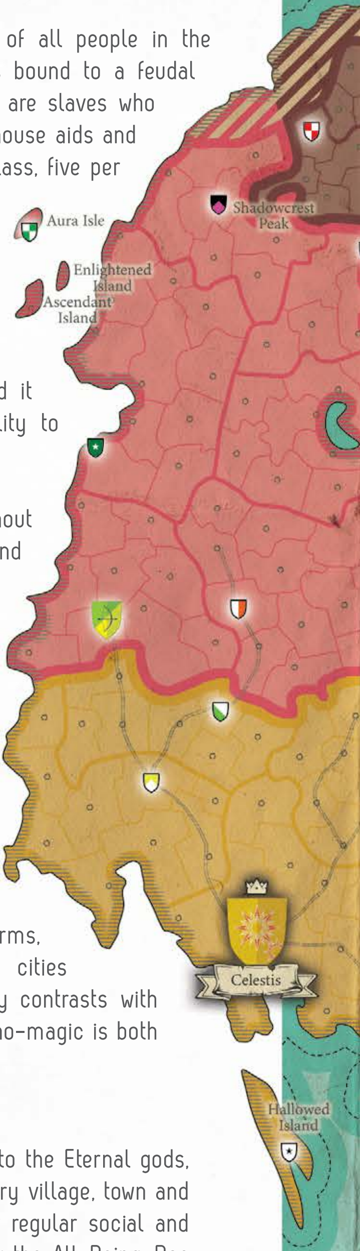
The Holy Kingdom was founded after the fall of the Empire during the cataclysmic Druidic War, and it took several generations for the noble House of Catla to truly secure the full authority of the crown that they wore. This authority was primarily seized through techno-magic but was again diminished as the nation was split in two by a civil war that created the Kingdom of Ire.

Many within the Holy Kingdom of Catla look upon Ire with pity and remorse. The Holy Kingdom is a stratified society that places great value on order and hierarchy, and despite the incredible indulgences of their noble class, they are far safer, more educated, more efficient and more technologically advanced than Ire.

People who do not fit into society – such as those who do not worship the Eternal gods – are pushed out and legally oppressed. Slavery is commonplace, especially of the Creet, Dracim and Remnant. The Holy Kingdom of Catla may be a place of security and order for all, but it is only a place of prosperity and safety for those with titles and wealth.

Culture

While all powerful demographics within the Holy Kingdom value order, the expressions of this value varies greatly between groups and regions. Ineffective rulers and those managing impoverished communities will quickly turn to fear and force, while the gifted and those overlooking prosperous lands will often lean on the power of wealth and social pressure to bring about cohesion. Those who do not conform – no matter their social status – will feel isolated and worn down by the constant subtle and overt calls to obey in exchange for ease.



Around fifty per cent of all people in the Holy Kingdom are peasants bound to a feudal lord for protection and work. Thirty per cent are slaves who mostly work the land, with some serving as house aids and educated workers. Ten per cent are middle class, five per cent are administrators and the final five per cent are nobility who have inherited positions of power through family birthright.

Arcane Technology

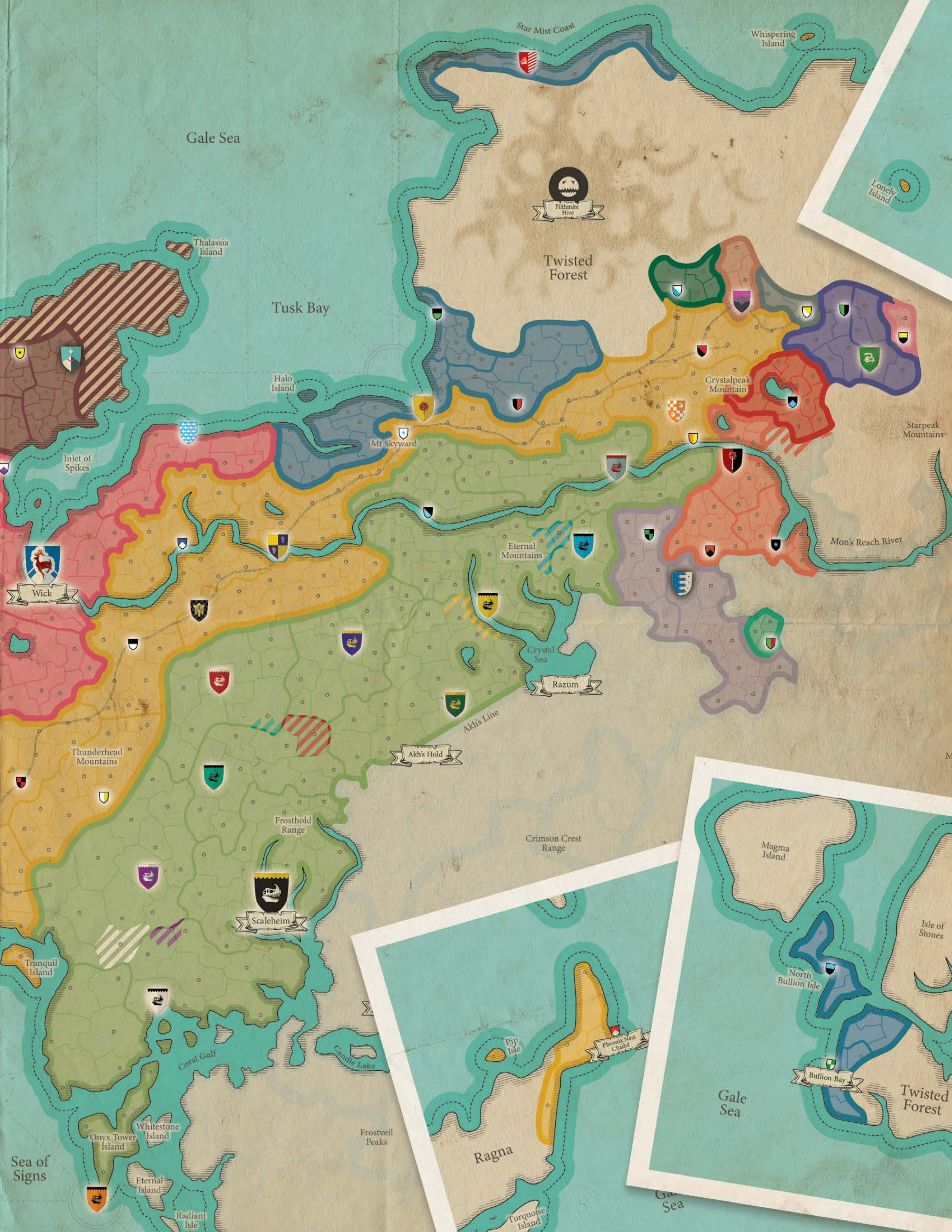
The royal House of Catla were the creators of modern techno-magic. They understand it better than any other, especially its ability to grant political and economic power.

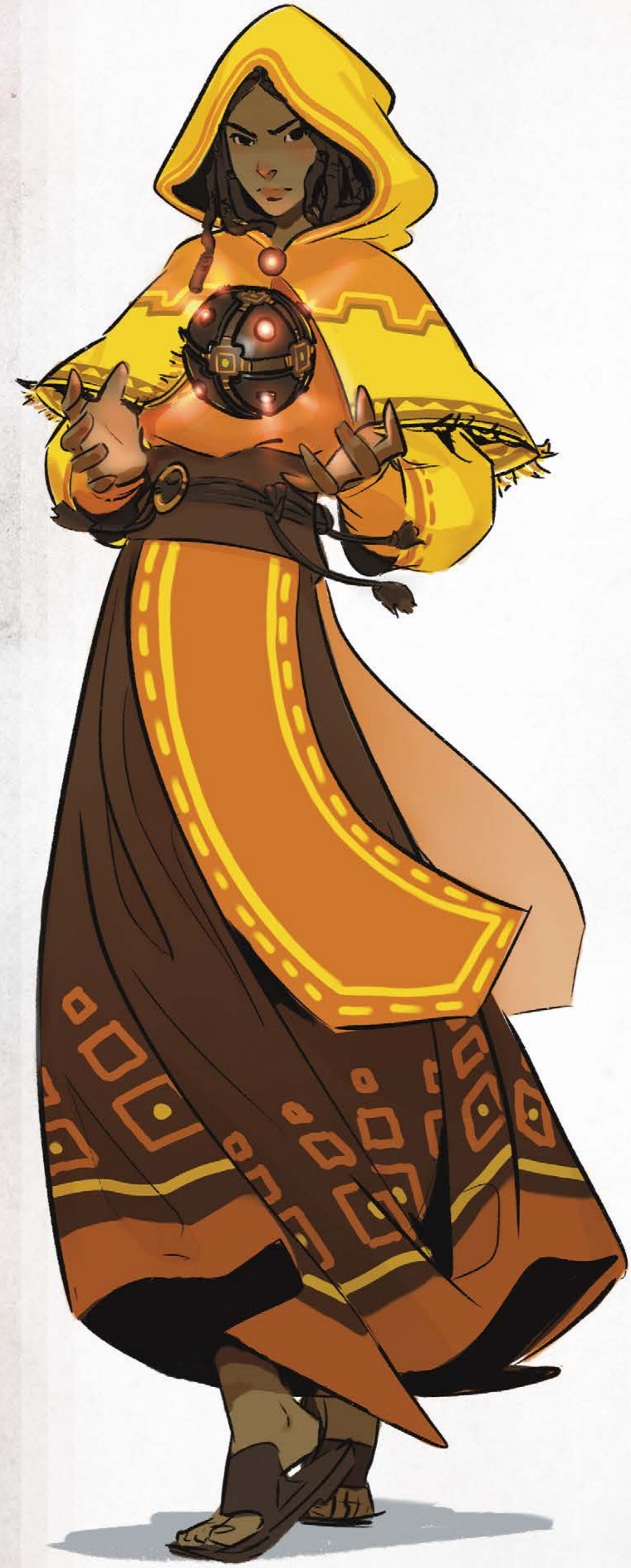
While techno-magical tools are used throughout the Holy Kingdom, the use of weapons and heavy machinery equires legal permits. The knowledge needed to build and maintain techno-magical items is tightly controlled by the nobility and House Catla. All new techno-magical finds from divine ruins and servants must be submitted to the authorities for investigation. All-Power magic are outlawed.

The Central Passage region is especially well-known for its use of grand techno-magic: guards are armed with firearms, fire-powered trains transport goods and cities glow with lightning-fed lamps. This starkly contrasts with the poorer Eastern Borderlands where techno-magic is both subtle and rare.

Religion

The Holy Kingdom is fanatically dedicated to the Eternal gods, with temples, shrines and priests within every village, town and city. Those outside the Eternal faith suffer regular social and legal persecution, especially those following the All-Being, Dos or the dead Neph. Nobles rule through divine mandate and never act without the approval of a priest or priestess. Those who are poor, sickly and weak are seen as lessers who have earned the ire of the gods. The powerful are seen as blessed.


Star Mist Coast
Whispering Island
Gale Sea
Filthmire Hive
Lonely Island
Thalassia Island
Twisted Forest
Tusk Bay
Halo Island
Crystalpeak Mountain
Starpeak Mountains
Mt Skyward
Inlet of Spikes
Mon's Reach River
Eternal Mountains
Wick
Crystal Sea
Razum
Akh's Line
Akh's Hold
Thunderhead Mountains
Frosthold Range
Crimson Crest Range
Magma Island
Isle of Stones
Scaleheim
Tranquil Island
North Bullion Isle
Pip Isle
Phoenix Nest Citadel
Coral Gulf
Candle Lake
Bullion Bay
Gale Sea
Twisted Forest
Onyx Tower Island
Whitestone Island
Frostveil Peaks
Ragna
Sea of Signs
Eternal Island
Radiant Isle
Turquoise Island
Sea



Kaltoran arbiter of Akh.

Slavery

The subjugation of Creet, Dracim and Remnant is rampant throughout the Holy Kingdom. Most can trace their lineage back before the civil war of Ire to the Drasong Clan or the Warped Kingdom. Although many are prisoners of war, debtors, criminals, heretics, captured tribespeople from the Twisted Forest or just the poor who have been scooped up and put to work.

Their skin is branded and their limbs shackled as they are forced to work farms, mines, construction sites and factories. Those without health or skills are quickly worked to death, those with both may find themselves elevated to less mundane duties. More than a few slaves work as scribes, domestic aids, shop managers, in harems and even as soldiers.

Slaves are considered property and have no more rights than any other owned object. Their only chance at liberty is to escape to the Kingdom of Ire, as not even their master can grant them freedom.

Law & Bureaucracy

The legal structures and bureaucratic institutions of the Holy Kingdom are expansive, robust and surprisingly resistant to corruption despite their blatant attacks on non-conformists. Punishments for breaking laws are heavy-handed, ranging from fines and public whippings to forced enslavement and bloody executions. All authority flows down a strict path of social hierarchy; great houses are at the top, followed by the Eternal clergy, then down to lesser nobles and citizens before ending with slaves.

Every person is told their place, every legal question has an answer, all crimes have a punishment and those who enforce the law are unrelenting. Justice is swift and applied with precision.

Lawmakers

The bureaucracy that creates and shapes the laws of the land are labyrinthian in their complexity. A one-page declaration is signed by the king and interpreted by **Justiciars** with teams of scholars who define the intent and application of the king's will. The documents that they create are further refined by **Legislators** before being distributed across the land to regional **Magistrates** and nobles who may make further recommendations.

What starts as a brief royal decree will end as a vast document within a month.

Arbiter Priests

These holy warriors of the god Akh or the goddess Jop Jop are the muscle of the law. They work with teams of legal scholars, zealots, bounty hunters and inquisitors to investigate and pass immediate judgement on criminals. Much of their time is focused on organized crime, escaped slaves, rooting out traitors and settling minor disputes within their jurisdiction.

- Arbiters of Akh work for nobles or the administrative state.
- Arbiters of Jop Jop work for the clergy.

- Nobles, clergy and wealthy citizens condemned by an Arbiter may challenge their judgement and force their case into the courts where they must fund their own thorough defence and prosecution.
- Those who give false witnesses suffer the same punishment that would have been inflicted upon their victim.
- Thieves must repay ten times what they stole, and possibly suffer enslavement if they are unable to do so.
- Murderers and traitors are publicly executed.

Permits

The Holy Kingdom makes use of a large number of permits and licenses to grant authority to engage in a range of activities. Such as carrying techno-magical weapons, using heavy techno-magical equipment, owning a medium-to-large-sized business, claiming bounties for escaped slaves or killing monsters, international trade, working on a ship and more.

These are used as a means to control the most impactful and lucrative parts of their society, ensure safety and as a reward to those who conform to social expectations.

Four Realms

The Holy Kingdom is broadly split into four realms, each dominated by a noble House.

Central Passage

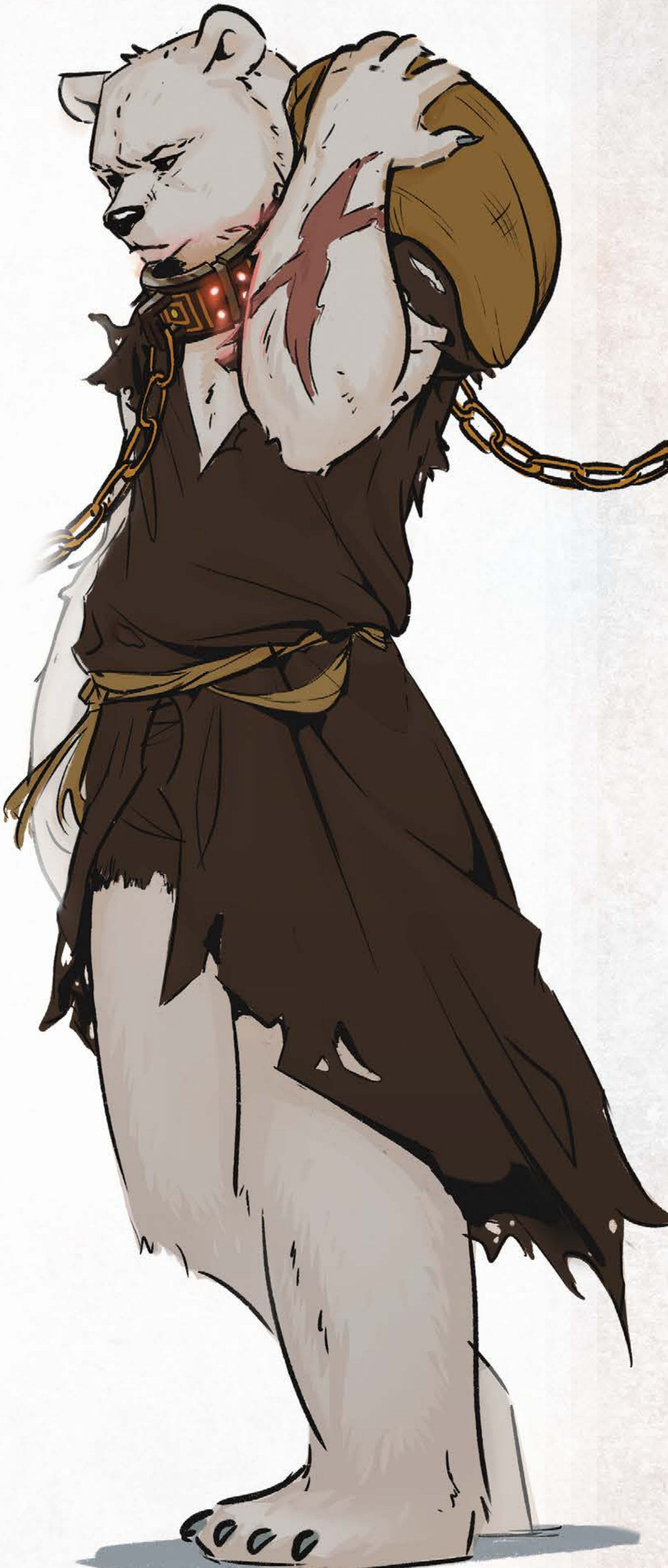
The royal House of Catla controls this long stretch of land that spans the length of the Holy Kingdom from the capital of Celestis on the southern coast to the northern frontier counties along the edge of the Twisted Forest. This is the wealthy heartland of the nation that allows House Catla to dominate the people and economy of their kingdom. It is a land of paved roads, grand buildings, techno-magic (even trains), production and order. All fueled by resources from the other three realms.

While there are many villages, it is the grand towns and cities that the Central Passage is known for. They have thick walls, multi-storied buildings, and are adorned by sculptures, mosaics and temples to the Eternal gods.

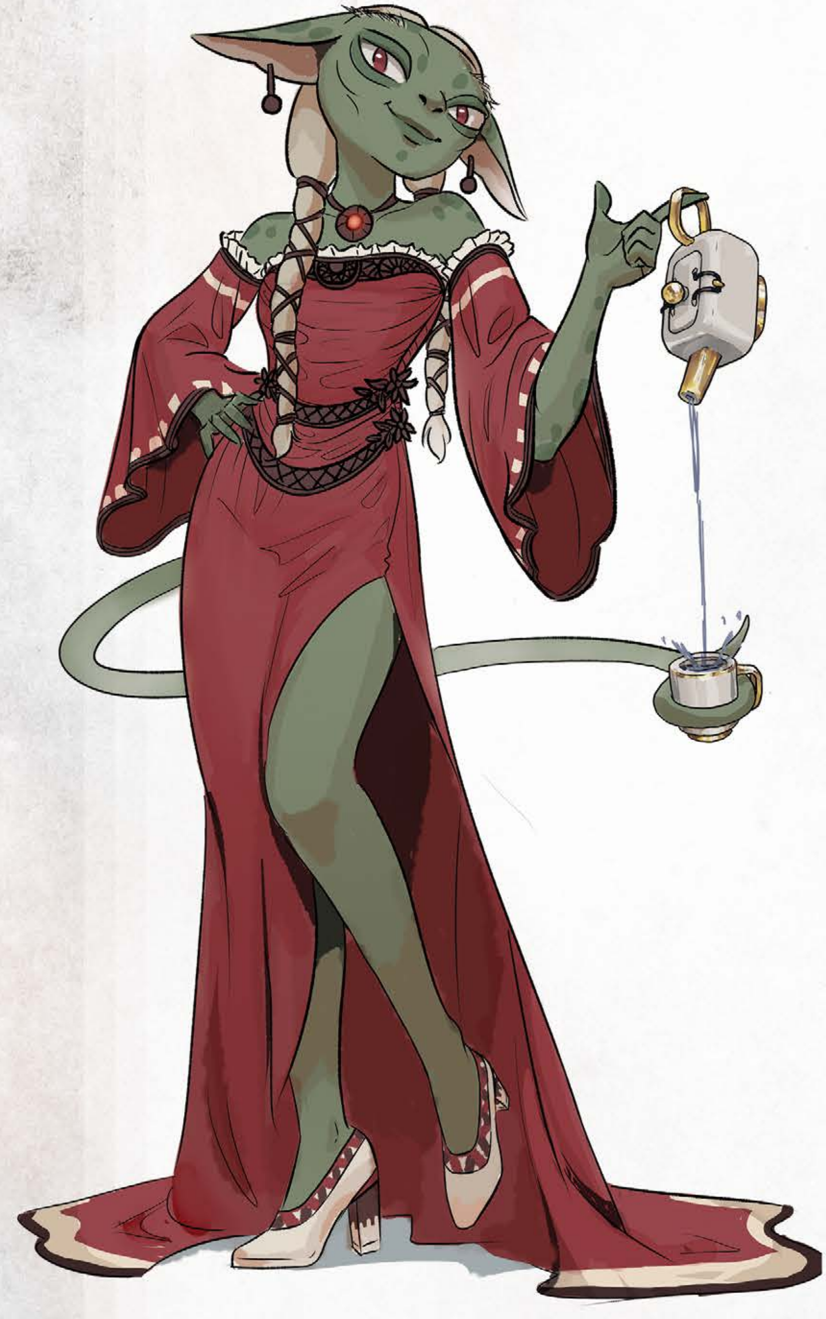
Colonies

In recent years the Holy Kingdom – and especially House Elpis – have claimed many distant shores as their own. These colonies are ruled by an appointed colonial governor or administrator who represented the Holy Kingdom's interests, especially the extraction of valuable resources and the establishment of trade networks.

The Holy Kingdom places a great emphasis on maintaining a strong navy as a fundamental element of their global ambitions. The kingdom's navy is viewed as a crucial instrument for protecting trade routes, securing overseas territories, cutting off Tilward Giant reinforcements and limiting Ire expansion. Slave populations are particularly large in the colonies as there is a greater need for manual labour.



Remnant slave.



Tolatl noble.

Eastern Borderland

This large eastern region of the kingdom is under the rule of House Burdragon and shares a long border with the Kingdom of Ire. It is a dark and tumultuous land of swamps, rolling hills and dense forests where the noble lords rule through force and fear. The ten sons of Grand Duke Trajan Burdragon are regularly embroiled in conflict against one another over land and politics, each preparing for the day of their father's death.

Agriculture and trade with Ire are the lifeblood of the Borderlands. Merchants pay handsomely for mercenaries to guard them against bandits and worse as they weave their heavy wagons along winding dirt roads between slave-tended fields.

The realm is dotted with shabby villages, and its dark corners attract monsters, escaped slaves and bounty hunters hired to hunt them both. The peasants of the Borderlands are a rightfully superstitious and reserved folk. They know better than to welcome strangers, roam at night or poke about for answers to strange noises and missing neighbours. Survival in this harsh land depends on keeping your head down and heeding the wisdom of ancient fables.

Western Arm

The western regions of House Boon and House Bard were once of near-grandeur to the Central Passage. They are now devastated by their war with the relentless giants of Tilward who have reduced Bard to a minor House. This is a protracted conflict, with House Boon relying on the cautious application of their resources to slowly push the Giants back into the sea. Boon and Bard may succeed at their difficult task, but they will not do so without securing assistance from new allies or the other great houses.

King Totec Catla is cynically using the conflict to drain House Boon of its strength, as he is slow-walking royal aid and resources to the region. This is a dangerous play, as it risks both Giant victory and pushing Boon towards darker masters who promise relief.

In desperation, Duchess Ruth Boon has turned to vampires for aid against her enemies. This has given her much power but has caused a second – secret – war to take root within her land. A conflict fought in the shadows between creatures of the night and witch hunters who have been drawn to her cities. House Boon is renowned for their architectural gifts, making use of their ancient Kaltoran family knowledge to construct grand gothic castles and structures of exotic design throughout their land.

Despite their fall, House Bard are skilled warriors and have fared better against the Giants than expected. Their land is a warzone of ever-changing fronts; dotted by broken palisade walls, trebuchets, burning pits and corpse piles. This is not a conflict of grand armies, but of skirmishes and heroic last stands.

Threats

The Holy Kingdom of Catla is a strong nation that gains much of its power from its efficient administration of both people and resources. However, it is a nation that is in open war with the Giants of Tilward, racing against the Kingdom of Ire to secure the northern Twisted Forest and has colonies spread out across the ocean. Catla may not be at risk of falling, but it is at risk of being overtaken.

Internal Control

The weight of the Holy Kingdom's laws and their cultural dedication to conformity has pushed many people to the edges of society. When this happens to a person of skill or influence it can often lead to sparks of unrest as they gather around themselves a secret network of disgruntled citizens or rebellious slaves. These groups rarely try to overthrow lords, but they are willing to smuggle people over to the Kingdom of Ire and return with unlicensed techno-magical weapons to empower their cause.

The Holy Kingdom pays great attention to all Eternal gods who are typically worshipped in grand buildings with sanitized sermons that present them in a clean and respectable light. Many fixate on a specific god and form cults of like-minded people around their chosen deity. Some become dangerously obsessed with the darker aspects of their patron - especially nobles who follow Dos or Nix - and practice dark and primal acts in their name.

Monsters are a particular issue in the wild corners of the Eastern Borderland. Wraiths, fey and Neph Spawn are attracted to the realm's many swamps and forests for an unknown reason. Some suspect peasant witchcraft, Neph cults or lax patrols from House Burdragon. Villages regularly turn to bounty hunters and mercenaries for aid.

Arbiter Priests are tasked with dealing with all of these internal issues, and they have a reputation for hiring eclectic bands of mercenaries, freelance knights, zealots and state Inquisitors. Arbiters have learned to notice skill in others so that they may be effective in their endless duties of upholding the law and keeping order.

Colonies

The distant holdings of the Holy Kingdom face significant risks due to isolation and the pressures placed on them to provide resources for the homeland. Supplies, military reinforcements and mail can be months or weeks apart. This can leave them vulnerable to monsters, druids, slave uprisings, pirates and the schemes of rival nations.

Smaller colonies are heavily reliant on a narrow range of exports, which leaves them vulnerable to market fluctuations and highly dependent on imported goods for their survival. The navy of the Holy Kingdom is both large and impressive, but even it struggles to secure all colonies and the long shipping lanes between them and the homeland.

Northern Expansion

Both the Holy Kingdom of Catla and the Kingdom of Ire are eager to expand into the northern Twisted Forest as it is rich in resources despite its many dangers. The Holy Kingdom is attempting to push deep into the region and over the top of Ire, encircling them so that they may cut off their rival's plans to reach the Gale Sea.

Tensions are rising as House Exios has been attacking their neighbours over disputed land, and other lords are sending spies into Ire to disrupt their frontier settlements. Despite this, the Holy Kingdom is losing the race as Ire villagers are quick to build and adapt, and the Holy Kingdom is overextended due to their overseas colonies.

Southern Control

The Holy Kingdom's navy is stretched thin along its southern interests as they are regularly battling aquatic Neph Spawn and the occasional Water Elemental. They claim all of the Gale Sea as their territory and refuse to allow the Kingdom of Ire to exit the Sea of Signs. This is an untenable situation as Ire ships regularly evade their patrols and it is only a matter of time before they face a concentrated Southern Legion attack on their unprepared coast.

Eastern Ire Tension

The two kingdoms of Catla and Ire are dedicated to avoiding open war with each other, but their interests are constantly at odds. The Holy Kingdom is slowly losing their control over the southern Gale Sea and the northern Twisted Forest, they are also unable to regain any slaves that successfully flee over the border or prevent smugglers from bypassing their taxes and bureaucratic systems. Ire is slowly gaining on most of their contested fronts.

To dominate their rival, the Holy Kingdom must leverage its strengths in raw productive power and espionage. With resources flowing steadily from distant colonies to the mainland, a period of stability would allow the Kingdom to outproduce Ire and infiltrate its institutions with malicious agents. In contrast, Ire's strength lies in its resilience and adaptability to threats. They could also just hope for the death of King Noskos.

Western Giant War

The Giants of Tilward devastated the House of Bard when they first arrived on the shores of the Western Arm. They are fearsome foes who initially caught the Holy Kingdom off guard and have now settled in for a protracted war against both houses of Bard and Boon. The Holy Kingdom of Catla may push their foe back into the sea, but they must travel to Tilward to gain ultimate victory.

The King is plays a dangerous game by holding back aid for the region to bleed House Boon of strength. If he is too slow the Giants may gain a footing and take the entire Western Arm.

House Catla

- See Central Passage write-up on pg: 105.

- **Ruler:** King Totec Catla the 4th (Tolatl).
- **Capital:** Celestis.
- **Subject Species:** Primarily Kaltoran, Legion and Tolatl.
- **Cultural Notes:**
  - Tolatl are culturaly dominante.
  - Large, proud and arrogant family.
  - Polygamy is common.
  - Heirs are selected.
- **Legal Notes:**
  - Lack of accountability to the law.
- **Economic Strengths:**
  - Administration, techno-magic, wealth.

"The king carried himself with an air of unassailable grandeur, as if his very existence were a testament to his inherent superiority. His countenances, ever marked by an imperious gaze below a large crown, surveying the world with disdain as if he alone possessed the keys to wisdom and authority.

His stride was proud, his small steps echoed throughout the halls of his opulent palace with his every movement attended to by a sea of servants, wives and sycophant nobles."

– Camille Paper,
ambassador for the Kingdom of Ire
observations of King Eduardo Catla.

The ancient House of Catla has a long and tumultuous history of towering heights and dark secrets. They see themselves as the creators of civilisation and techno-magic, with a divine responsibility to tame Ackharon, bring about progress and prevent its fall back into the Age of Darkness.

They are a haughty and arrogant family, with unparalleled wealth and power that allows them to do as they please. While the Holy Kingdom of Catla adheres to a strong legal structure that prides itself on the equal application of the law to both nobles and peasants; the rulers of House Catla stand apart as the creators of that law and the ultimate authority in its interpretation. In public, they are careful to uphold all social expectations and etiquettes, but in private there are some among their family who are hopelessly corrupt and enslaved to all manner of debauchery.

The Catla family is large, as its powerful men have had multiple wives and numerous children for many generations. Most reside within the capital city of Celestis or in rural estates spread out across the Central Passage of the Holy Kingdom. Those down the pecking order who have no hope of inheriting power or wealth will occasionally roam across the land looking for opportunities to gain influence. Some have even found themselves in the Kingdom of Ire travelling under a false name.

King Totec Catla

The aged king of the Holy Kingdom of Catla is an incredibly proud and ruthless man. King Totec the 4th is an effective ruler who has a gift for managing political factions and uplifting and pushing down the right people within his family. The Holy Kingdom is a powerful nation, but it would not be nearly as prosperous without the king's efficient and cunning mind.

King Totec has not yet publicly declared an heir, and all sixty-two of his wives are eager for it to be one of their children. The carers of the king's progeny create careful reports on their education and personalities, the most promising are given further studies, with the greatest few personally attending to the king so that they may be groomed to rule. The chosen heir is typically male as they're able to have more children, though the ruler before Totec was his late mother the genius Queen Gabriela Catla the 2nd. Those who are not selected to take the crown are well-educated and will commonly serve as royal advisors or occupy a prominent position within a national institution.

Voice of Akh

In golden time immemorial, when the Eternal gods roamed Akharon's plains and oceans, Akh did declare a great truth: for fellowship between mortal and divine, one must stand as envoy and ambassador, bridging the two realms. Such became the Voice of Akh, now an ancient tradition in which the ruling monarch acts as the divine voice of Akh himself.

The House of Catla believes that only they retain this privilege, a boon for their faith and steadfastness. The ruling monarch alone may touch the mind of Akh, bringing forth decrees, praise, or calls to supplication. One such proclamation echoed through the centuries is the reclaiming of the nations, bringing them back into the fold and re-establishing the mighty and rightful Empire of Catla. Akh has ordered the entire continent to turn back to the old traditions – especially those favoured by the current noble factions – an immense undertaking that has been patiently planned across entire generations of royals.

Yellow Arbiters

- See Arbiter Priest write-up on pg: 104.

The Yellow Arbiters of Akh are the personal enforcers, guardians and assassins for the House of Catla. They make use of advanced techno-magical tools along with a compliment of personally selected – and often eccentric – agents.

These Arbiters are a common sight in the capital city of Celestis as they guard all royal interests. Their presence outside of the capital is rarely seen as they prefer to keep a low profile, often disguising themselves as travelling merchants or low-born nobles. While they may take on a range of tasks, they are especially well known for hunting down nobles who are a threat to House Catla.

Celestis

The coastal city of Celestis was the capital of the ancient Empire of Catla and was destroyed by the Archdruid himself when he slew Emperor Coaxoch the 10th (pg: 69). The city was built over an ancient divine ruin that was created by the god Akh and his wife Corp. It was also the place of rest for countless ancient nobles in large catacombs that weave under the foundations of the city's many lost temples.

The Holy Kingdom has rebuilt the city in the style of its mythic history with columned buildings, paved roads and grand statues. The divine ruin has been excavated, but most of its catacombs remain collapsed, flooded and infested with monsters.

The Archdruid marked the fall of the Empire and its ruler with the planting of a beautiful black lily that is known as the Archlily. The flower has been embraced by the Holy Kingdom as a symbol that all gods must be worshipped, including the new goddesses Nijin and Jinin (pg: 190).

Techno-Magical Trains

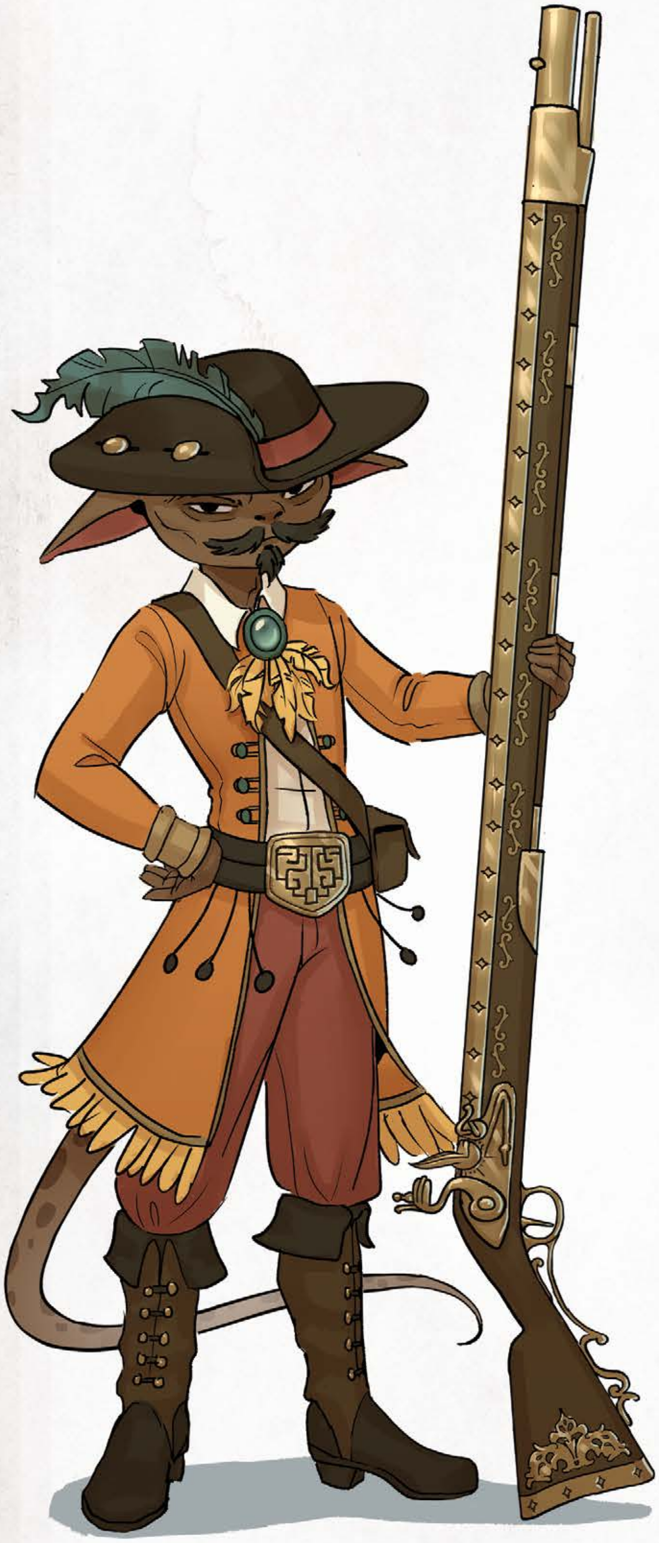
Winding across House Catla's vast domain is the Central Passage, a crucial supply chain through which flows lumber, foodstuffs, minerals, troops and a thousand other resources that are the nation's lifeblood. In any other country, this road would be fraught with peril, an arduous journey for cart and wagon, beset by beasts and bandits. Catla, however, prides itself on advancement.

Techno-magical trains with engines aflame traverse the Central Passage, metal juggernauts leaving trails of smoke that can be seen for miles even across borders. The secrets of this technology are jealously guarded, known only by the royal family and a trusted cabal of engineers, and only an even smaller circle can fathom their true inner workings. Rulers of rival nations publicly scoff at the unwieldiness of such a network, and yet espionage tells a different story, with jealous foreign powers making frequent (and unsuccessful) attempts to uncover the mechanical secret.

Unbeknownst to the adoring citizens who wave and salute as the trains power through their land, operating such mechanised monstrosities is a staggering task, requiring immense resources and gruelling maintenance. The royal family's personal train – **Dawn's Chariot** – is an ostentatious vehicle gilded with gold and rubies, a glittering symbol of decadence despised by engineers for its impracticality. Even the nation's rulers must surreptitiously disembark the second they leave the public eye, swapping elegance and grandeur for the drab trappings of a more practical train.

Court of Queens

Polygamy is rife within the Kingdom of Catla, endorsed and exemplified by the reigning monarch, who boasts sixty two wives and an entire village's worth of heirs. Tradition dictates that the Holy Kingdom's ruler take on multiple spouses, a privilege of the position and a decree from Akh himself, ensuring that the blessed royal bloodline is kept secure. While the kings of old took only two or three wives, this number has ballooned over time as each heir attempts to top the number of their predecessor.



Tolatl royal marksman.

Sequestered in their own section of the royal residence, this immense gathering of wives is no mere harem, but a powerful governing body brimming with intrigue and vicious struggles for power. Known as the Court of Queens, they have steadily gained prominence as a vital branch of government. With their network of agents and active crafting of internal policy, the Court in many ways wields more authority than the king himself.

Locations of Note

Mt Skyward

Perfectly situated at the narrowest part of the great Central Passage lies Mount Skyward, a peerless peak visible across a vast swathe of the Holy Kingdom. Its staggering height and jaw-dropping views are far from all the mountain has to offer, however, and delving into its rocky crags reveals a sprawling web of well-maintained tunnels and intricately laid train tracks. Once a cumbersome natural barrier, Catla's techno-magical trains now pass straight through the core of Mount Skyward, with a number of stops at the mountain's heavy mining sites.

Goods from the north, south and even distant colonies stream through these grand tunnels, while a colony's worth of workers and slaves labour within to extract Skyward's fulsome resources. With the bustling port city of **Alacria** as its close neighbour, Mount Skyward now stands as a shining jewel at the metaphorical heart of the Holy Kingdom, a crucial resource hub and a symbol of Catlan innovation.

Phoenix Nest Citadel & the Ragna Colony

Known far and wide as an exemplar of what a colony should be, the Phoenix Nest Citadel is part of the colony on Ragna and a pilgrimage site for many a zealous traveller, despite its far flung location. To its upper class citizens, Phoenix Nest has been uniquely blessed by the gods with a wellspring of prosperity. Built atop a cliff overlooking a tranquil stretch of crystal-blue ocean, the Citadel has strong links to the capital city of Celestis, which benefits from abundant shipments of ironwood lumber, precious resins and exotic fruits found only in Ragna.

A grand temple to Etso is a popular destination within Phoenix Nest, built directly into the ocean cliffside. Scenic views and glorious sunshine make the temple a prime destination for rowdy droves of young scholars, supposedly sojourning from their studies to spend time meditating on Etso's lofty ideals of peace and musical expression. Inevitably, these pilgrimages devolve into ale-soaked revelry, midnight beach feasts and cavorting escapades that don't make it into their letters home to their families or masters.

The Citadel's ports and plantations tell an entirely different tale, with its prosperity carrying a heavy, secretive price. As the kingdom's faraway darling, Phoenix Nest receives little oversight, and the conditions of its slaves are brutal even by the Holy Kingdom's standards, requiring frequent shipments of fresh blood when the old workers expire.

Threats & Opportunities

The entire Holy Kingdom exists to feed the political and industrial machines of the House of Catla. They hold onto their power through a vast and well-equipped army, a labyrinthian web of political agents, overflowing vaults of gold, unique techno-magical wonders, and control over the Eternal priesthood as Ath's chosen voice. This centralisation of power gives the nation strength, but it also creates many enemies as it crushes and oppresses millions to get what it wants.

Kingdom of Ire

As befitting of a vast kingdom, especially one known for loudly declaring its own superiority, Catla is beset by enemies both within and outside its borders. The nearby Kingdom of Ire remains a constant source of embarrassment, having the gall to take away House Catla's territory through civil war, flagrantly spurn Ath's divinely ordained social order, and openly welcome escaped slaves fleeing the Holy Kingdom.

Relations between the two monarchies remain frosty. House Catla dares not openly strike at the demigod king, but they prepare for his eventual death. With the patience of a cliff battered by ocean tides, Catla's nobles have planned over centuries for the resurrection of their great empire. The Kingdom of Ire is eyed with particular relish, as it will be the first to be broken and reabsorbed when the Holy Kingdom's armies surge outwards, although Akh's decree has stayed their hand from any drastic action up until now.

Revolts

Slavery is widespread across the Holy Kingdom, and while laws have been introduced to supposedly curb more malicious abuse from slave owners, revolts constantly bubble beneath the surface. Many of House Catla's colonies lie far from the homeland across great oceans, with more than a handful wrested away from royal rulership by successful revolution. House Catla's heavy-handed style of rule may work in the Central Passage, but it struggles to produce lasting positive results in the colonies.

Noble Power Games

The natural flow of time constantly results in the creation and fall of Great Houses. No one knows this better than House Catla, and they are on guard to ensure that none can threaten their rule ever again.

Far to the north is the territory of House Boon, besieged by the giants of Tilward. Posturing from royal heralds would have the Catlan people believe that this situation is well in hand, with the royal family generously sending aid to defend their northern kin. In reality, this 'aid' is being slow walked to its destination and heavy laden with excuses, all in the hopes that Boon will be fractured by the conflict. Further south, House Burdragon is embroiled in its War of Ten Sons, a grisly civil conflict. Behind closed doors, House Catla nobility are happy to toast the family schism as it is sure to break up their vast territories when their patriarch finally dies.

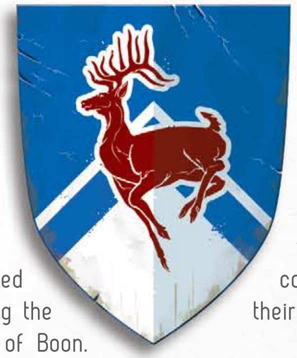
House Boon

- See House Bard write-up from pg: 116.
- See Giants of Tilward write-up from pg: 160.

- **Ruler:**
  - Duchess Ruth Boon (Kaltoran, Vacubus Vampire).
  - Advisor Alaric von Steinbrock (Tolatl, Vacubus Vampire).
- **Capital:** Wick.
- **Subject Species:** Primarily Kaltoran and Tolatl.
- **Cultural Notes:**
  - Land has many grand castles and buildings.
  - Value knowledge and tactics.
  - Many vampires and witch hunters in their land.
- **Legal Notes:**
  - Close allies of House Bard.
  - At war with the Giants of Tilward.
  - Political enemies of House Catla.
  - Vacubus vampire are a secret power behind the duchess.
- **Economic Strengths:** Ore, food.

"Power, Duchess Boon, is a delicate thing," the vampire murmured, his voice a silk thread curling through the night. "I offer you more than mere dominance over your lands and greater than freedom from giants or that tyrant king. I offer eternity – immortality, a reign that stretches beyond time and death. All I ask is a fragment of your soul, a sliver to bind you to our goddess Nix."

– Alaric von Steinbrock,
the Duchess's final night.



The Western Arm of the Holy Kingdom is embroiled in war against the Giants of Tilward who are crushing the Duchy of Bard and pushing up against the Duchy of Boon. These two noble Houses formed a bond during the civil war that separated their nation from the Kingdom of Ire, and have once again found themselves thrown into war together. Bard are known for their combat prowess, and Boon for their mastery of tactics and grand castles.

The House of Boon is renowned for its scholars and engineers. Their schools are among the best in the world, and their great windmills, farms, mines and forges release a river of produce that not only fuels their conflict with the Giants but also flows out into the wider Kingdom. Though most produce from the land must pass through the Central Passage which is controlled by the royal House Catla where it is heavily taxed.

It is an open secret that House Catla wishes to keep the House of Boon in its place, and will not allow them to ever gain enough power to challenge their rule. Before the war, House Boon and their vassals were heavily taxed and **Arbiters** were regularly deployed to the land to seize property from corrupt nobles. Following the Giant's invasion some of these taxes and pressures were loosened, but few supporting soldiers have been sent as House Catla wishes to bleed Boon dry before they push the Giants back into the sea. Catla are playing a dangerous game. If successful the duchy of Boon will break apart into small realms that are easier to control. If they fail, the House of Boon will grow in power due to military success… or worse, they will fall to the Giants and the inner lands of the Holy Kingdom will be threatened.

Diabolical Duchess

Lady Ruth Boon was a beacon of wisdom and knowledge, but she has struggled with the Giant War and against growing resentment from within her own family. She is loved by her people for her beauty, kind heart and attention to their well-being, but has been unable to outmanoeuvre the political and economic attacks of House Catla. House Boon is powerful and has been unable to gain support from other Houses – aside from House Bard – who also wish to see them fall several rungs down the ladder of power.

In the throes of desperation, she has turned to the shadows for salvation. Faced with the imminent collapse of her family, Ruth has formed a dark pact with vampires of the **Vacubus** bloodline, trading the warmth of mortal ties for the cold embrace of undeath. For a time the Duchess grappled with the haunting consequences of her desperate bid for survival, but with the passage of time such moral struggles have faded.

With the aid of Vacubus vampires, House Boon has halted the advances of the Giants, but has possibly seeded a new covert war within their realm. The rival vampiric **Lamio** bloodline has moved into the land, along with many witch hunters who have caught the scent of corruption. If their friends in House Boon discover her pact, their alliance may break.

Wick

The capital city of Wick is a beautiful metropolis of many architectural wonders. Graceful spires pierce the sky, adorned with intricate carvings that chronicle the city's rich history. Cobblestone streets weave through districts, guiding citizens and visitors alike past grandiose temples to the Eternal gods and charming townhouses. Market squares buzz with life beneath colourful awnings, and crystalline waterways reflect the beauty of arched bridges. As daylight bathes the city, Wick's architectural wonders stand as silent witnesses to the ingenuity of its people, a captivating testament to the fusion of artistry and function.

As the twin suns of Akh and Ath dip below their horizon, the city transforms as shutters are locked, doors barred and only the night watch and prostitutes dare walk its beautiful midnight streets. The citizens have heard the screams, clashes of steal and flashes of magic. All residents know to open their doors for no one, as innocence is a beguiling mask worn by both hunted and hunter alike.

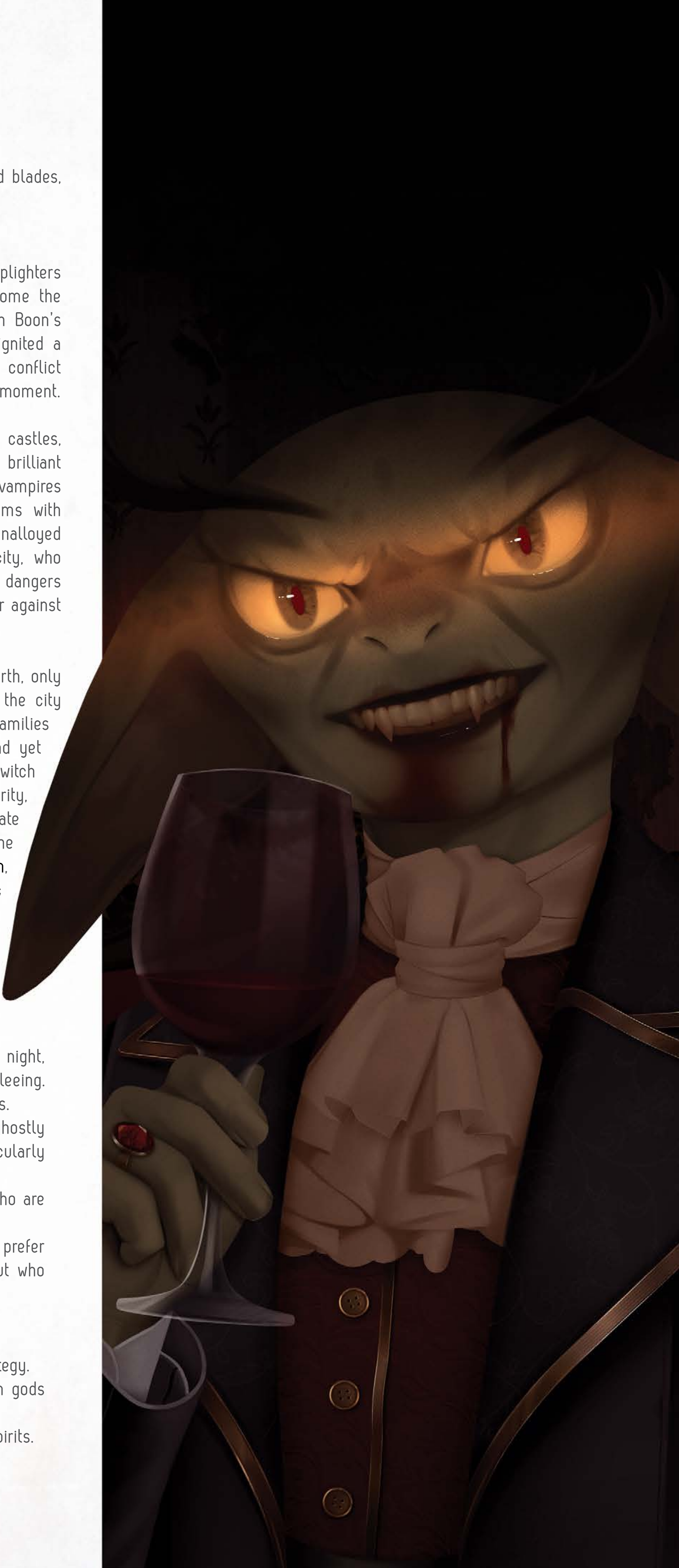
A clandestine war brews within Wick between powerful vampires and relentless witch hunters. The fanged servants of Nix are forced out into the night to satiate their thirst for blood, and they are met by cunning and holy hunters hunters armed with silver-edged blades, garlic bombs, holy symbols, crossbows and firearms.

Shadow War

As the twin suns vanish below the horizon and the lamplighters finish their nightly duties, the dark corners of Wick become the battleground in a war of fang and shadow. Duchess Ruth Boon's fateful bargain with the Vacubus vampire bloodline has ignited a fight for Wick's very soul, a clandestine but bloodsoaked conflict with ordinary citizens blissfully unaware – at least, for the moment.

By day, beams of sunlight lance through Wick's grand castles, towering cathedrals and ornate turrets, casting the city in brilliant hues that highlight its historic splendour. Come the night, vampires stalk the rooftops and alleyways, picking off their victims with impunity and leaving no trace of their existence. This unalloyed exsanguination has drawn witch hunter factions to the city, who spend their days trying to convince Wick's citizens of the dangers that lie in the dark, and their nights waging a desperate war against an enemy that treats the city as their playground.

With most able-bodied soldiers battling giants in the north, only the young, old, weak and incompetent are left to guard the city and its surrounding regions, emboldening the vampire families are tightening their bloodstained grip. Ragtag, scrappy and yet united by their crusade against the creatures of the night, witch hunters fight to hold back the rising tide of vampire superiority, scrabbling for resources and carrying on increasingly desperate campaigns to expose and rout vampire strongholds. Led by the impossibly long-lived Tolatl, the patriarch **Valmir Ashwyn**, the Vacubus bloodline holds sway over all other vampires; however, while they could unite to crush the witch hunter menace for good, they remain far too complacent in their own superiority, preferring to clash with other bloodlines over petty feuds.



Vampiric Bloodlines

- **Bestias:** Renown for their control over animals of the night, this bloodline prefers to hunt fearful victims who are fleeing. They have the unique power to create vampiric animals.
- **Geist:** Masters of necromancy, this bloodline creates ghostly minions from crypts and graveyards. They're also particularly good at self-regeneration.
- **Lamio:** None can match the speed of this bloodline, who are rumoured to move so fast that they appear invisible.
- **Vacubus:** Self-appointed rulers of the vampires, they prefer beautiful aristocratic victims and are very picky about who they add to their bloodline.

Witch Hunter Factions

- **Grimoire:** Grizzled veterans who value tactics and strategy.
- **Immolation:** Eclectic holy order who venerate the sun gods Akh and Ath.
- **Snail Knights:** Ta'Di hunters who make clever use of spirits.

House Burdragon

- See Central Passage write-up from pg: 105.

- **Ruler:** Grand Duke Trajan Burdragon (Legion).
- **Capital:** Scaleheim.
- **Subject Species:** All species.
- **Cultural Notes:**
  - Legion are culturaly dominante.
  - Fear and superstition are common.
- **Legal Notes:**
  - Heavy taxation and harsh punishments.
  - Lands are patrolled by Black Knights.
- **Economic Strengths:** Trade with Ire, food.

"Whips, beatings, racks and gibbets are not there to change the character of the criminal. They are there to change the character of the onlooker. A warning of what is to come if they do not obey."
– Grand Duke Trajan Burdragon.

The violent House of Burdragon has long stood at the right hand of House Catla, acting as their loyal sword and fist. During the civil war, they laid waste to many traitorous noble Houses, claiming their land as their own. They now rule the vast Eastern Borderland, a realm of rolling hills, swamps and dark forests. Theirs is a sombre domain of many dangers where people are ruled through fear and chains.

A perpetual mist hangs over many of the towns and villages within the realm of Burdragon. Small thatched-roofed cottages, taverns with crackling hearths and tilting ancient shrines huddle together in clumps between meandering dirt streets and gnarled trees. Villagers carry an air of resilience and are clad in rough-spun garments. Skinny chain-gangs of slaves work the fields under the watchful eyes of well-fed taskmasters with long whips and calloused hearts. Beyond the farms, secrets unfurl amidst the haunting beauty of the surrounding wilderness, where Neph Spawn beasts and dark spirits lie in wait, ready to challenge the bravest souls who dare to venture forth into the unknown.

Grand Duke Trajan & the Black Knights

The ageing Grand Duke Trajan is a formidable figure with a hulking build and commanding presence. He is a man of few words, but his scared body and missing left leg tell tales of many wars and slain foes. Trajan is a lord made for directing armies and slaying monsters, and not politics, economics or peace. His realm has suffered greatly under his rule as he has used brutal displays of violence to enforce his will, and heavy taxation to cover his selfish lifestyle, bloated army, bad investments and failure to invest in techno-magical equipment for his workers.

A cornerstone of his power resides in the Black Knights, an order of horned mist raptor riding warriors that roam the lands to ensure obedience. These knights rarely travel together outside of war, and are often accompanied by an Arbiter, squire and raptor handler.

The Burdragon family have bred reptilian raptors for a thousand years, and lord Trajan has a particular passion for the vicious creatures. Under his care, the mounts of the Black Knights have been mixed with wylding to produce larger and tougher breeds.

The Black Knights strike an imposing figure emerging from the thick fog, sitting astride beasts that can tear open throats in a mere heartbeat. Mist raptors are notoriously fickle, considered near-impossible to train by even the most experienced beast tamers, and the raptors of the Eastern Borderlands are no exception. They are kept in line only by the brutality of their masters, heeding their orders and consenting to bear riders under threat of lash and steel, although incidents of rogue raptors gobbling up wayward peasants – or even their own riders – are not uncommon.

Mist Raptors are essential for the superiority of Burdragon's knights, as they alone may traverse the land's poorly kept terrain with ease. Their agility and keen senses allow them to swiftly pass through swamps unimpeded, and they are unafraid of even the darkest forest depths. Bringing a mist raptor to heel is a rite of passage for Burdragon nobles wishing to become knights, after which master and steed are bound for life in a cycle of cruelty and combat.

> The swamp stank of rot and sulfur, its mists curling like dead men's fingers around the gnarled roots of blackened trees. The hunters crouched low, inspecting the tracks – bare feet, uneven gait. Peasants, dragged unwillingly, their fear etched into the mud like an accusation. The lead hunter straightened, eyes narrowing at a trail of crushed reeds leading toward the heart of the bog.
>
> Night had fallen by the time they reached the clearing. A fetid altar of moss-covered stone stood before them, draped in the corpses of four dead peasants. The bog hag emerged, her eyes glinting like swamp fire, a crown of bones adorning her twisted scalp. She hissed in an unknown language as she lunged forward with clawed hands. The hunters didn't speak. Words were wasted on such creatures.
>
> When it was over, they dug shallow graves for the remains of the villagers. The swamp consumed their markers, as it had devoured their lives.
>
> – Felling of the Small Reed Swamp Hag.

War of the Ten Sons

Grand Duke Trajan's grandfather fought in the civil war and grew the family land to its current size. Trajan's father was a statesman – a rare trait in the Burdragon family – who was responsible for building up the realm's faltering industries. Trajan inherited a vast and prosperous domain but struggled to maintain the loyalty of his many vassals. Lacking the skills to negotiate and compromise, with the help of House Exios the brutal lord killed his ten largest vassals (which included some of his own family) and granted their titles to his ten eldest sons.

This bloody act shocked his remaining noble subjects and almost brought down the wrath of the king. For nine years the ten sons of Trajan have ruled their lands in the style of their father, and are often at war with one another over disputed territory. When the Grand Duke dies it is almost inevitable that the Eastern Borderland will be broken up. But the Grand Duke does not care, as long as his domain remains intact during his life. A few wiser members of the Burdragon family have taken note of the impending disaster, and have started to take measures to ensure their immediate families' future.

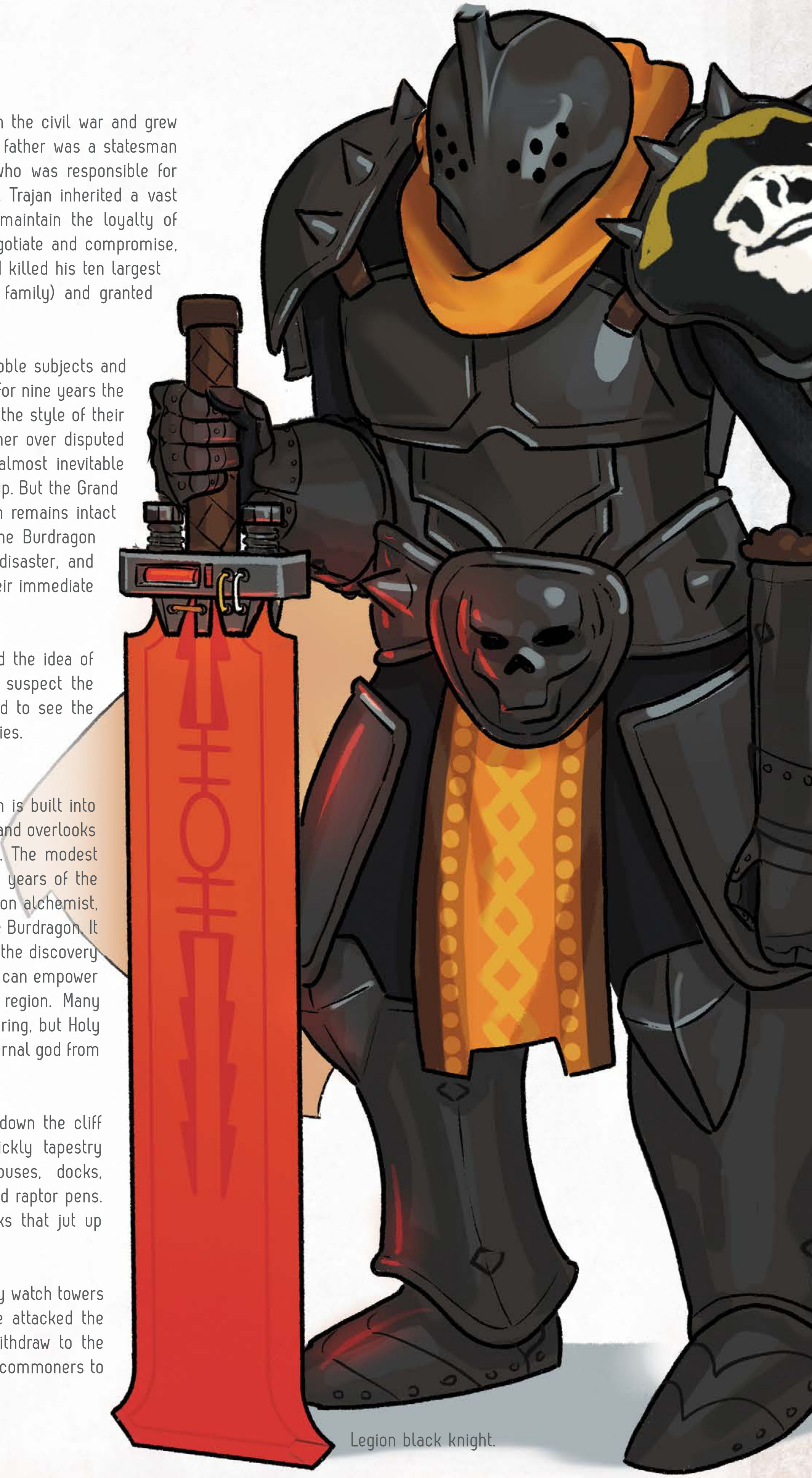
Some suspect House Lagos spies planted the idea of taking these titles for his children. Others suspect the royal House of Catla who would be pleased to see the grandy duchy divided up into smaller counties.

Scaleheim

The imposing black fortress of Scaleheim is built into a vast cliff face within the Frosthold Range and overlooks a wide river that feeds into the Coral Gulf. The modest original structure was built during the later years of the ancient Empire of Catla by an unknown Legion alchemist, and has been rebuilt and expanded by House Burdragon. It was not originally intended to be a city, but the discovery of an embedded divine machine of Dos that can empower forges transformed the economy of the region. Many priests are cautious of the evil god of suffering, but Holy Kingdom law forbids the exclusion of any Eternal god from worship.

From its fortress core, the city spreads down the cliff and across both sides of the river. A sickly tapestry of thatched-roofed stone and wood houses, docks, warehouses, taverns, blacksmiths, guilds and raptor pens. All weaving around great rune-etched rocks that jut up into the sky like the claws of a dead beast.

The city proper is secured by no wall, only watch towers and patrolling guards. If it were to ever be attacked the nobles, knights and wealthy elite would withdraw to the fortress and leave the peasants, slaves and commoners to fend for themselves.



Legion black knight.

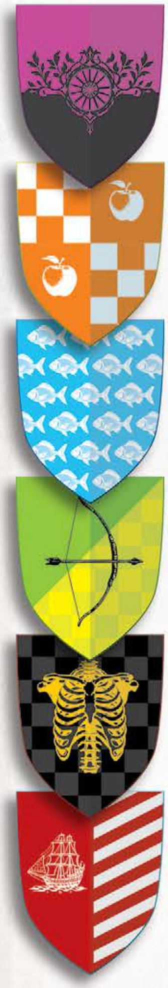
Example Minor Houses

While there are more nobles within the Holy Kingdom of Catla than the Kingdom of Ire, there are fewer noble houses and power is concentrated around key figures within the great houses. Members of the minor houses and most lesser nobles within the great houses rarely own land beyond a personal estate.

Noble titles are always hereditary and can trace their origins back to the ancient Empire of Catla. Distinguishing oneself through service to the nation can gain an individual a position of administration over an important institution, but never knighthood or the elevation of their family name to lesser nobility. Administers have become a kind of common noble, a class of powerful priests, merchants and scholars who manage the affairs of the Holy Kingdom. Many minor houses work as administrators.

Those minor lords and ladies who do manage land tend to be mayors, vassal Barons or rulers of a northern frontier realm along the edge of the Twisted Forest. There is also talk of minor houses securing colonies across the Gale Sea in the near future.

House Catla wishes to see more great houses reduced in status, as this will prevent the development of a political force that could threaten their rule.



Calmec

- **Ruler:** Mayor Popol Calmec (Tolatl).
- **Capital:** Brackenridge.
- **Subject Species:** Primarily Kaltoran.

Dynamis

- **Ruler:** Viscountess Hera Dynamis (Legion).
- **Capital:** Hollowmont.
- **Subject Species:** Primarily Legion.

Hueh

- **Ruler:** Earl Ajaw Hueh (Tolatl).
- **Capital:** Everport.
- **Subject Species:** Primarily Tolatl.

Lornbow

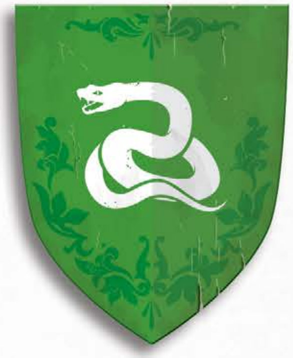
- **Ruler:** Countess Isla Lornbow (Kaltoran).
- **Capital:** Maplewick.
- **Subject Species:** Primarily Kaltoran.

Morvow

- **Ruler:** Earl Conall Morvow (Kaltoran).
- **Capital:** Crestfall Castle.
- **Subject Species:** Primarily Tolatl.

Sapientia

- **Ruler:** Baron Homer Sapientia (Legion).
- **Capital:** Duskcliff.
- **Subject Species:** Primarily Legion.

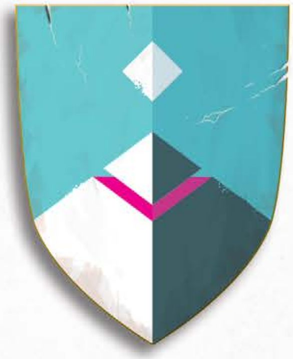


Apollonios

- **Ruler:**
  - Earl Eran Apollonios (Kaltoran).
- **Capital:** Tajdeed.
- **Subject Species:** Primarily Kaltoran.
- **Cultural Notes:**
  - Proud of their history.
- **Legal Notes:**
  - Unique authority within the Eternal priesthood.
- **Economic Strengths:** Lumber.

The ancient House of Apollonios holds a unique place within the Eternal faith as they were the source of much of what is known about the gods. They were an isolated nation before the Empire and had developed an intricate religious structure with many great works of art and theatre. Within a single generation, they transformed the simplistic spiritual outlooks of House Catla into what is now seen as the Eternal Priesthood.

Apollonios was a significant House of power, wealth and land before the civil war. Their previous home seized by House Tredeki, they are now forced to etch out a humbler life on the edges of the Twisted Forest. Earl Eran is eager to return his House to glory, and will go to any means to do so.

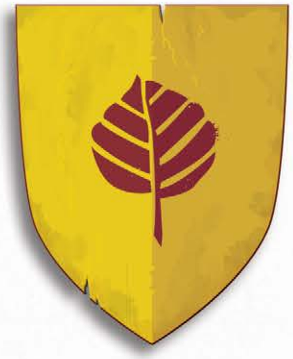


Bard

- **Ruler:** Duke Isaac Bard (Kaltoran).
- **Capital:** Har Gavoah.
- **Subject Species:** Primarily Kaltoran.
- **Cultural Notes:**
  - Skilled warriors.
- **Legal Notes:**
  - Close allies of House Boon.
  - Most of their land is occupied by the Giants of Tilward.

The ancient family of Bard are no longer a grand noble House, for they have been devastated by the Giants of Tilward who crashed upon their shores in great ships to devour their land. Though they may have lost their capital city of Har Gavoah, Bard are survivors and warriors who will never give up. With the aid of the neighbouring House of Boon they have constructed a wooden fortress within their heartland to operate as a marshelling ground for their forces. In time they hope to gather enough aid to push the giants back.

Bard fought vigorously against the separatists during the civil war that forged the Kingdom of Ire. Not because they were particularly loyal to the crown or eager to oppress slaves, but because of their hatred of their ancient enemy: the manipulative House Lagos. Centuries past they were betrayed by Lagos and they have been unable to curb their thirst for revenge.

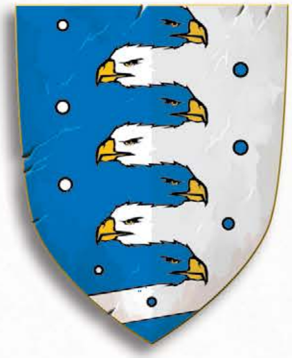


Elpis

- **Ruler:**
  - Marquess Tlaloc Elpis (Tolatl).
- **Capital:** Alacria.
- **Subject Species:** All species.
- **Cultural Notes:**
  - Strong focus on money: both good and bad.
- **Economic Strengths:**
  - Salt, colony trade.

The famous 'House of Golden Loyalty' has a reputation for being a family of banks, merchants, gambling dens, prostitution rings and mercenary companies. But this is also a reputation that some members chafe against; causing them to go out of their way to support charitable causes or perform grand acts of sacrificial heroism. 'There are two sides to the family coin' is a favourite saying of Marquess Tlaloc Elpis, the stern patriarch of the family.

House Elpis is a burgeoning power that is soon to become a great House due to their many successful colonies across the ocean. These settlements are secured by mercenaries, worked by slaves and governed by skilled vassals or family members.

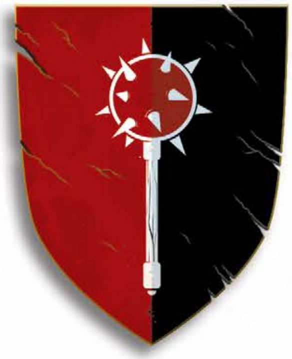


Gratia

- **Ruler:** Earl Alex Gratia (Legion).
- **Capital:** Virtus.
- **Subject Species:** All species.
- **Cultural Notes:**
  - Pious to the Eternal Gods.
  - Hardy.
  - Few slaves.
- **Economic Strengths:**
  - Animal products, trade with Ire.

The County of Gratia is a rugged land of rolling hills and overgrown stone ruins from the Druidic War. They are known for their xytgel chickens, roaming herds of thud cows and minimal reliance on slaves. The county is bordered on three sides by the Kingdom of Ire, with whom they maintain a delicate peace, depending on the kingdom for trade and stability.

Gratia are a noble house who hold their vows to the gods in the highest regard During the civil war that birthed Ire the countess of Gratia swore an oath of loyalty to House Catla, a bond only to be broken by the god Akh himself. Gratia's people are pious, hard-working and steadfast – a striking contrast to their nearby allies: Burdragon and Exios.

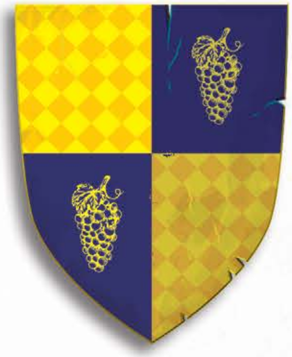


Exios

- **Ruler:** Duke Nestor Exios (Legion).
- **Capital:** Dynamis.
- **Subject Species:** Primarily Legion.
- **Legal Notes:**
  - Politically isolated.
  - At war with Ire over disputed land along Mon's Reach River.
- **Economic Strengths:**
  - Black market goods, weapons.

The thuggish House of Exios were once vassals of the Grand Duke Trajan Burdragon. They earned their independence by assisting him in the elimination of the former vassal lords that governed his land (pg: 115). They are trusted by no one for this gruesome act and the Grand Duke later used them as a legal scapegoat; resulting in the execution of many Exios lords and ladies.

Duke Nestor Exios is a particularly bitter man who has become frustrated due to his political isolation within the Holy Kingdom, and physical isolation by the Kingdom of Ire who have surrounded his land, cutting him off from further expansion into the Twisted Forest. Not one of the delicacies of politics, Duke Nestor has decreed Ire an invading force and has mobilized his military and many hired bandits to take back disputed land along the Mon's Reach River.



Glordis

- **Ruler:** Baron Javier Glordis (Tolatl).
- **Capital:** Xpili.
- **Subject Species:** All species.
- **Legal Notes:**
  - Proud and cruel lord.
  - Highly taxed.
  - Well-armed guards.
- **Economic Strengths:**
  - Wine, train track craftsmen, passage over the Glor Bridge.

House Glordis control a barony within the Central Passage and are renowned for their expansive vineyards and skilled craftsmen who service the tracks for the Holy Kingdom's trains that pass over Mon's Reach River. The land surrounding the town of Xpili are beautiful, green and patrolled by well-armed guards. Xpili is dominated by the Glor Bridge and the brightly coloured markets that line the train tracks that pass through the centre of the town.

Baron Glordis is a harsh ruler of his small domain, imposing high taxes and military levies upon his subjects. Just as his lord imposes on him and House Catla in turn imposes upon them. The Baron has made many political enemies throughout his life as he is proud and delights in cruelty. However, he is politically untouchable as long as the trains are never delayed.

Twisted Forest

“Trees? Those things ain’t trees. Every twisted one of ‘em is some poor soul dragged to Nix by a forsaken Druid spell, and now they’re clawin’ their way up towards the suns.”

– Malin Galebay,
Tolatl merchant.

Only a few aside from the gods can remember a time before the Twisted Forest, an era in which the northern reaches of the Catlan continent were settled with zeal by the ancient Empire of Catla. In those days the landscape teemed with cities, towns and grand monuments to the gods. Now there is only the forest, stretching on for endless miles, an emerald ocean promising adventure, riches and ruin.

The Druidic War ravaged the landscape in the strangest ways, with immense effusions of wild magic spilling out across the continent as the Archdruid and his minions laid waste to civilisation. Tales tend to dwell on the destruction, perhaps as a warning against the Empire’s rejection of nature and fear of the now-dead goddess Neph, but life and growth were also wrought by those druidic spells. The druids reshaped the continent to their liking with wylding and rituals, raising up swathes of vegetation and even forging new rivers and mountain ranges. The land was to be consumed by green, vast woodlands of preternaturally strong trees that can only barely be called natural. They spread ravenously, swallowing up cities, castles, villages, caves, valleys and lakes, until the only the very southern tip of the continent and the Blood Stone Desert remained unclaimed by forest.

Perhaps that would have been the fate of all Akharon, had the Druidic War not come to its abrupt end when the Archdruid abandoned his great mission at the walls of Stronghold. Now, even after almost two centuries of arduous arborist work to free the lands, the Twisted Forest still dominates the north, capturing the imaginations of explorers and the eye of all leaders with a penchant for expansion. A race for land has since gripped the Holy Kingdom of Catla and the Kingdom of Ire, who are now in an especially close-fought race to claim pieces of the tangled woods to grow their nations. So great is the Twisted Forest’s influence that it has even helped to avert war: with the staggering unclaimed vastness of the forest at their doorstep, countries have one less reason to spill blood over land.

The vast Forest is an inscrutable void of coiling trees and clutching vines, with even the spell-infused roots seeming to groan and shift beneath the feet of travellers, as if raging against their intrusion. The few paths that exist wind around rolling hills, through gushing streams and coursing rivers, and the air is thick with the eerie cries of birds and beasts found nowhere else on Akharon. An ethereal, ever-present mist drifts through the foliage of the Twisted Forest: not thick or smothering, but just enough to obscure lines of sight, or give the jolting impression of movement in the corner of one’s eye. The broken remains of civilisation litter the woods, broken castles, consumed cities and once-proud temples choked by roots, steadily succumbing to the Forest’s inexorable march.

Thoughts of abandoned castles, lost tribes and enchanted wonders have fuelled the imaginations of adventurers the world over. To many, the forest is home; to some, it is a foul blight concealing sites of dark wylding magic; but to all, it is a vast realm of secrets and treasures yet to be discovered.

Through two hundred years of backbreaking labour, large sections of the woods have been reclaimed by frontier settlers, hired mercenaries, simple folk with axes and blades. All pouring blood and sweat into every inch of dirt, and piece by slow, agonising piece, the Twisted Forest has been beaten back. Nobles across the land pay handsomely for all kinds of quests into the Forest, sending their agents to seek knowledge, procure artefacts, establish relations, slay beasts and more. Two centuries of effort have mapped only a fraction of what lies within the dense, foreboding woodlands – and yet, uncounted sites of power, interest and danger await.

Amaranth Village

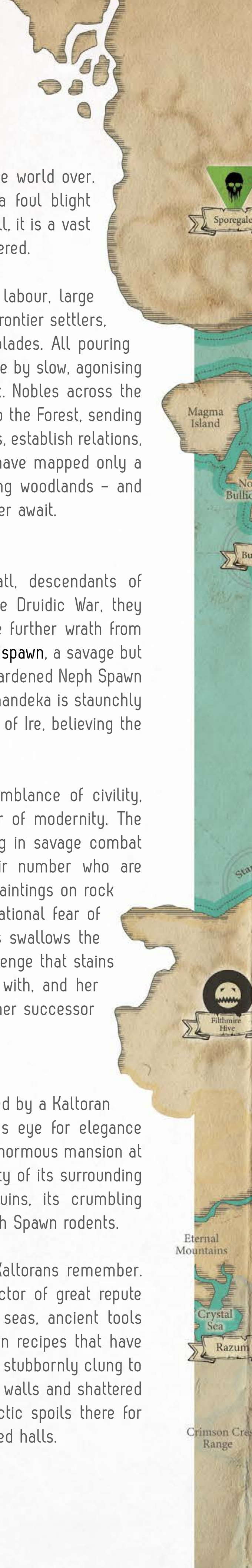
A primitive settlement of Legion and Tolatl, descendants of the ancient Empire of Catla. Devastated by the Druidic War, they discarded all trappings of civilisation to escape further wrath from Neph’s servants. They are led by **Thandeka Woodspawn**, a savage but cunning Legion who stalks the forest draped in hardened Neph Spawn bones that act as both armour and weaponry. Thandeka is staunchly opposed to re-integrating into the new Kingdom of Ire, believing the goddess Neph to be alive and well.

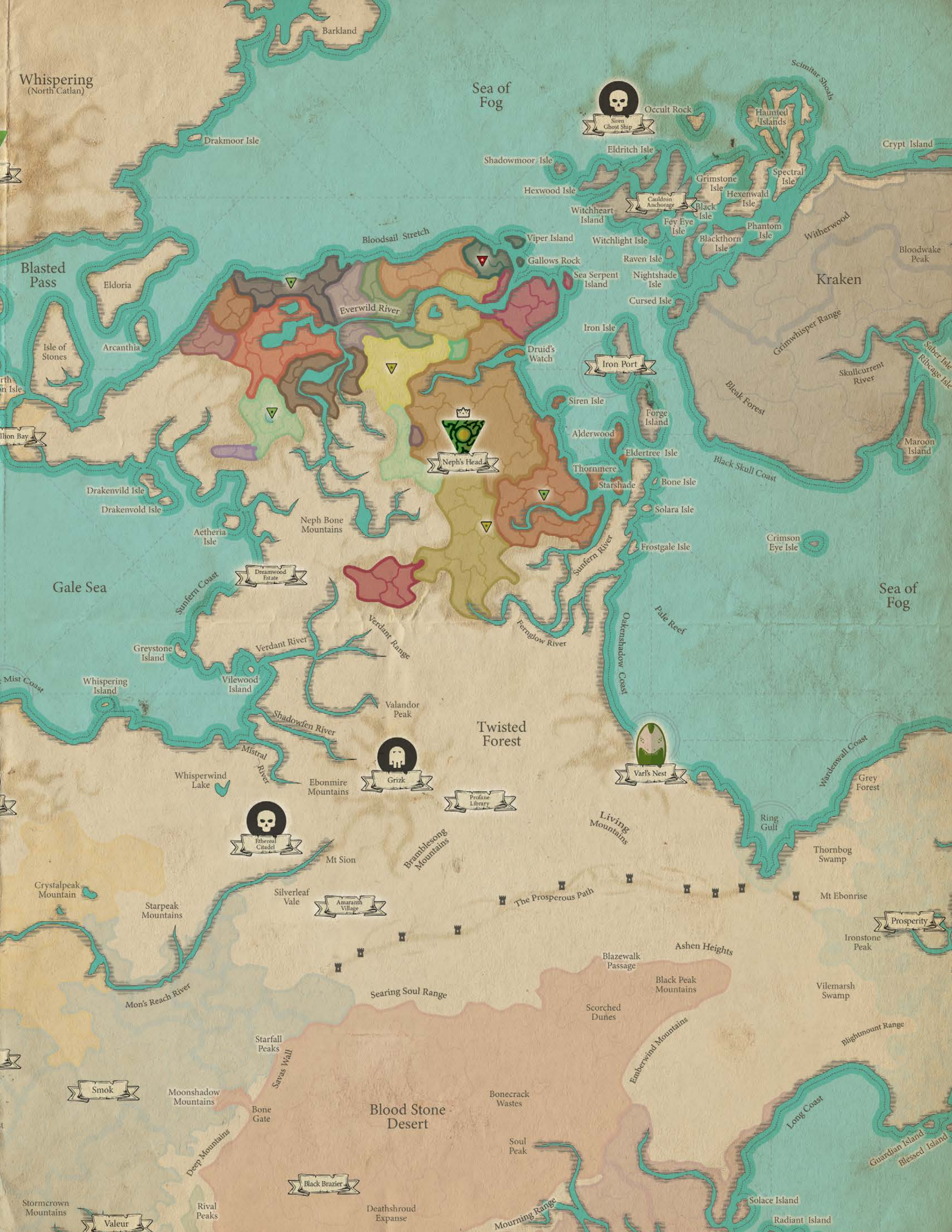
The village has long since cast off any semblance of civility, bound only by respect for strength and a fear of modernity. The people of Amaranth wield stone tools, engaging in savage combat rituals and mercilessly executing any of their number who are deemed to have had aided the outside world. Paintings on rock walls around the village shed light on their irrational fear of Neph: gruesome tableaus in which the goddess swallows the suns and leads her armies on a rampage of revenge that stains the land sickly red. If Thandeka can be dealt with, and her people convinced of Neph’s demise, then then her successor may be open to all kinds of change.

Dreamwood Estate

In better days, the Dreamwood Estate was ruled by a Kaltoran noblewoman of **House Valdis** with a meticulous eye for elegance and alchemy. The stunning architecture of the enormous mansion at its centre was matched only by the sheer beauty of its surrounding gardens. Now the estate lies in overgrown ruins, its crumbling mansion a wild and untamed lair of vicious Neph Spawn rodents.

Of the mansion’s true purpose, only a few Kaltorans remember. The noblewoman was a highly eccentric collector of great repute and unusual tastes; rare artefacts beyond the seas, ancient tools from before the Empire of Catla and rare potion recipes that have been lost to time. It is said that the Valdis noble stubbornly clung to her estate even as the Druidic trees pierced the walls and shattered the windows, and there she still rots, her eclectic spoils there for anyone who might brave the Neph Spawn-infested halls.




Barkland
Whispering
(North Catlan)
Sea of Fog
Siren Ghost Ship
Occult Rock
Scimitar Shoals
Haunted Islands
Drakmoor Isle
Eldritch Isle
Crypt Island
Shadowmoor Isle
Grimstone Isle
Spectral Isle
Hexwood Isle
Cauldron Anchorage
Hexenwald Isle
Witchheart Island
Black Isle
Fey Eye Isle
Phantom Isle
Witherwood
Bloodsail Stretch
Viper Island
Witchlight Isle
Blackthorn Isle
Bloodwake Peak
Blasted Pass
Gallows Rock
Raven Isle
Eldoria
Sea Serpent Island
Nightshade Isle
Kraken
Everwild River
Cursed Isle
Grimwhisper Range
Isle of Stones
Arcanthia
Iron Isle
Druid's Watch
Saber Isle
Ribcage Isle
Iron Port
Skullcurrent River
Bleak Forest
Siren Isle
Forge Island
Alderwood
Neph's Head
Maroon Island
Eldertree Isle
Black Skull Coast
Thornmere
Starshade
Bone Isle
Drakenvild Isle
Drakenvold Isle
Solara Isle
Neph Bone Mountains
Aetheria Isle
Crimson Eye Isle
Frostgale Isle
Sunfern River
Dreamwood Estate
Gale Sea
Sunfern Coast
Sea of Fog
Pale Reef
Oakenshadow Coast
Verdant Range
Fernglow River
Verdant River
Greystone Island
Mist Coast
Whispering Island
Vilewood Island
Valandor Peak
Shadowfen River
Twisted Forest
Mistral River
Grizk
Varl's Nest
Wardenwall Coast
Grey Forest
Whisperwind Lake
Ebonmire Mountains
Profane Library
Living Mountains
Ring Gull
Ethereal Citadel
Bramblesong Mountains
Mt Sion
Thornbog Swamp
Crystalpeak Mountain
Silverleaf Vale
The Prosperous Path
Mt Ebonrise
Starpeak Mountains
Amaranth Village
Prosperity
Ironstone Peak
Ashen Heights
Blazewalk Passage
Black Peak Mountains
Vilemarsh Swamp
Mon's Reach River
Searing Soul Range
Scorched Dunes
Blightmount Range
Emberwind Mountains
Starfall Peaks
Savas Wall
Smok
Moonshadow Mountains
Bone Gate
Bonecrack Wastes
Blood Stone Desert
Long Coast
Soul Peak
Deep Mountains
Guardian Island
Blessed Island
Black Brazier
Stormcrown Mountains
Rival Peaks
Deathshroud Expanse
Mourning Range
Solace Island
Valeur
Radiant Island

Ethereal Citadel

Ruins lay scattered across the entirety of the Forest, destroyed by war, claimed by nature and thick with decay. Though few compare to the Ethereal Citadel, which still bears a sliver of grandeur despite the ravages of time. Once home to an ancient Legion king from **House Burdragon** who thought himself a demigod, the citadel is a sprawling, palatial structure of metal and stone. Lavish gardens and statues served a façade for the despotic cruelty of the citadel's ruler who was so enamoured by his own magnificence that he thought himself immune to Neph's rage. He was proven drastically wrong when the roots burst into his throne room, the stubborn king still sitting atop the dais as the floor crumbled and swallowed him whole.

The Ethereal Citadel now teems with wraiths, tortured spirits of the former inhabitants. Many of these lost souls were Remnant slaves, their freedoms stripped away after they refused to renounce the All-Being god and bow to their vainglorious monarch. Worked until their bodies perished, they are now eternally chained to their place of suffering. The spectre of the king himself still stalks the vine-infested halls and root-smothered gardens, staunchly refusing to accept his own mortality. The sheer strength of his lingering malice can cause the worlds of the living and dead to bleed into each other. The king's ghost is especially enflamed by living All-Monks setting foot in his domain, and he will stop at nothing to drag them into the afterlife and chain them to his service.

Filthmire Hive

Chomper nests are the bane of all, but sequestered in the murky depths of the Twisted Forest, Filthmire Hive goes above and beyond. Led by an insidious Brood Queen with tools and resources stolen from the Holy Kingdom of Catla – their closest neighbours and bitterest enemies – these Chompers and their revolting realm are among the most advanced of their kind ever encountered.

Filthmire Hive lies at the heart of a treacherous, stinking swamp, its scant safe pathways concealed beneath a haze of noxious gas and acrid fumes that burn the lungs of intruders. **Brood Queen Hshhhrifwmmm** – self-named after the noise her teeth made when she tore out the throat of a Catlan army captain – sits atop a throne of packed mud, gaudily decorated by sticks, wilting weeds and the shiniest of her spoils, haphazardly jammed into the structure and welded with spit. Her 'citadel' is no better, little more than a heaping of hollowed-out filth with imitations of turrets, castle walls and a bubbling, boiling moat.

In the hive itself, Chompers of all castes attempt some warped version of daily life: 'clothing' themselves in rotting animal skins and rusted metal, or 'haggling' in a marketplace that inevitably escalates to brawls and broken teeth. Only when raiding the Holy Kingdom's outlying territories do the Chompers cast off all pretension and show their true savage selves, although displaying surprising cunning and tactics, especially when the queen sends forth her deadly aspirant children – Beastmasters, Putrids, Knights and Sporemancers – to enforce her wretched will.

Grizk & the Web

Should any traveller set foot in the Twisted Forest, odds are that they will unknowingly pass over the Web. Snaking beneath the wood is a vast network of labyrinthine tunnels, dizzying in scope and pulsing with life, from towering bioluminescent fungi to pools of boiling, semi-sentient slime. Key to the Web's ecosystem are Neph Spawn with fearsome spider forms and wily cunning. They claim the tunnels as their own, gathering resources from across the forest and even trading their potent alchemical brews with those they deem worthy. These spiders are canny negotiators, though they are also easily whipped into a ravenous frenzy should they suspect theft.

The Neph Spawn spiders share their tunnels with a colony of Trolls, this relationship rapidly bouncing back and forth between grudging coexistence and bloody civil war. The troll town of Grizk lies even deeper underground than the spider nests, a smattering of rough-hewn caves and mining pits ruled by **Ponk the Rumbler**: a gargantuan, corpulent Troll that spends more time eating than governing, too bulbous to traverse his own caves. Never great thinkers or scholars, the Trolls nonetheless share a strange relationship with the rock and stone of their home, able to navigate to almost anywhere beneath the Twisted Forest by sheer instinct.

Living Mountains & Varl's Nest

Druidic spells spilled across the landscape during that fateful conflict, warping the natural world into a contorted reflection of what it once was. The Living Mountains are among the strangest of examples, the result of a failed spell that sent magical energy cascading outwards, seeping into the ground and giving life to the foundation stones of a mountain range just north of the Prosperous Path trade roads.

The Living Mountains continue to move on a whim, changing from one nigh-impossible stone labyrinth to another. Few seek out the Living Mountains as they move with an eerie silence, rearranging the landscape to snare travellers. Only skilled Dracim rangers from the coastal town of Varl's Nest – a distant colony for the fearsome Dragon King **Terratorse** – dare to roam the mountains freely. They have learned her ways and know of many secret paths. They are the reason why Varl's Nest has grown from a camp to a town, and may one day grow from a town to a city.

Profane Library

Knowledge is power, or so the ancients once said. Nowhere is this truer than the Profane Library, a series of spiralling towers jutting from the midst of a great gorge and linked by chain bridges. On the eve of the Druidic War, a demonologist fled the wrath of witch hunters from the Empire of Catla. A Tolatl noble and Dos worshipper of obscene repute, he is said to have turned the tables upon his pursuers, striking back from the darkness and using their corpses in conjunction with twisted magic to raise great blackstone towers that can move of their own free will. The demonologist would be left to his own devices as the war raged, free to scry and pilfer, gathering stockpiles of foul knowledge and slaking his lust for power.

What became of the demonologist, no one can say for sure. The halls of the Profane Library now swarm with demons, leading most to believe that the Library's creator has long since perished at the hands of his minions. And yet, the troves of knowledge remain, mountains of books and secrets etched into the dark stones themselves. All expeditions to the Profane Library have failed, but this has done little to temper the zeal of interested parties – whether they wish to claim what lies within, or burn the entire forsaken place to the ground.

Shimmerglade

Even within the Twisted Forest, the winding pathways to the Shimmerglade are rarely traversed by adventurers. Evermoving and said to only reveal itself when the night sky is devoid of Corp's moon, Shimmerglade is a vast grove inhabited by faeries, devoted adherents of Nix. These fey are inscrutable and fickle, sometimes welcoming visitors and other times siccing their guardian beasts upon intruders – although they adore exotic gifts that may be traded in their bustling marketplace.

Mirrors are greatly valued by the faeries of Shimmerglade, who hold the belief that reflections are truly glimpses into Nix's realm. Enchanted mirrors of a thousand purposes may be found at the Shimmerglade market, allowing one to gaze upon distant parts of the world, confound attackers, or even step between two locations as if passing through a doorway.

Alas, the grove as of late has been under siege from the Goblin Queen **Incarneia**. She lurks within the dense woodlands, her sights firmly set on corrupting Shimmerglade into her new seat of power with its faerie denizens as her unwilling subjects.

Whisperwind Lake

Deep within the Forest lies a vast lake of crystal-clear waters. Named 'Whisperwind' for the ethereal breeze that passes across its surface, from the perspective of one standing upon its shores, the scene is one of eerie tranquillity. Shrouded in perpetual mist, Whisperwind Lake appears as still as glass and calm as a rolling meadow, beckoning travellers to wade within its shallows. More enticing is the hypnotic green flame flickering in the distance, said to be a fire atop a mysterious lighthouse on an island at the lake's centre.

The lake itself is a deadly trap, snapping its jaws shut as soon as would-be explorers leave the safety of the shore. Whisperwind runs deep, hiding a plethora of aquatic Neph Spawn monsters, each one more horrific than the last. Though they may be locked in eternal underwater battle with each other, they remain vigilant for even a ripple across the lake's surface, which stirs them into a frenzy of teeth and tendrils. A legend is told among many explorers of the Twisted Forest, promising a great boon to any who survive the lake and reach the lighthouse; the granting of wishes, the answers to what lies beyond the furthest stars, or even a gateway to the realm of the gods themselves. To this day, the red flame remains a mystery, as none have braved the Whisperwind Lake and lived to tell the tale.

Angels of Akh & Ath

» See Akh write-up on pg: 179.
» See Ath write-up on pg: 182.

» **Eternal Creators:** Akh, Ath and Pol.
» **Common Motivations:** Territorial (divine ruins), kill Neph Spawn and wylding-infected creatures.
» **True Nature:** Archon created bio-mechanical super warriors who are slumbering inside geothermal-powered military bases until they're awoken.

"Its floating form, a blazing silhouette of writhing tentacle wings and muscular limbs. Overwhelmed by its presence, I could do nought but drop my shovel to prostrate myself upon the ground in fervent supplication. By Akh's mercy, I alone was spared... yet the scars etched upon my charred skin and soul shall never heal."

– Martha Woodsy,
sole survivor of the Ammon Hill dig.

After Neph killed the god Pol, both Akh and Ath wept bitterly for their fallen brother. Rage, fear and confusion flowed through their bodies for the first time, and the twin's burning tears mingled with the blood of the dead god of magic. From this blending of divine fire and arcane blood the Angels were born; blazing infernos of death, magic, loneliness and sorrow.

The Angels have never been truly loyal to the Eternal gods, but they were inclined towards Akh and Ath, and had a burning hatred for Neph and her creations. Now that the god of nature is dead, the remaining Angels lack purpose and many have taken to slumbering in divine ruins that reside in volcanoes.

These golden (Akh) and crimson (Ath) Angels are immensely dangerous bipedal creatures with long tentacles protruding from their backs and expressionless faces that split open to reveal a glowing white light. They can defy Akharon's hold and float through the air without wings, turn mortals to ash with a wave of their hands and bend techno-magic to their will.

Legends say that their one weakness is their hatred of Neph, and that they can be distracted by Neph Spawn, Dracim, wylding magic and the like. No legends exist of any mortal defeating an Angel through strength, and there is forbidden lore that whispers of their ability to kill a god. All consider it a blessing that there are so few of these monsters.

Growth & Change

Despite their fearsome reputation, there are tales of a few Angels beginning to process the great grief of their nature and have started to see reason. Some have even come to the aid of mortals who worship Akh or Ath.

The crimson **Ixtli**, is not the most fearsome of Angels, but he was the first to replace his rage with clarity. He seeks to rescue his brethren and offers the 'Blessing of Ash' to those who aid him.

Archdruid's Realm

- See Druidic War write-up from pg: 68.
- See Death of Neph write-up on pg: 72.
- See image of Neph's Head on pg: 73.

- **Ruler**: Archdruid (Remnant).
- **Capital**: Neph's Head.
- **Subject Species**: Primarily Neph Spawn.
- **Cultural Notes**:
  - Not a true nation, but a collection of aligned druidic factions and monsters drawn to the Archdruid.
- **Legal Notes**:
  - Might makes right.
- **Economic Strengths**: Wylding.

> "Demigods are born or made when the worlds of the divine and mortal collide – sometimes in trickery, rarely in love, but most often in the raw, crackling discovery of godly power. The mightiest of these are the dragon Languorem and King Noskos, and the greatest of these greats is the Archdruid. Mortal man and wild beast alike are drawn to such power. Around them, cities rise like mushrooms after rain, armies form as if from the dust, and rules are made that no one dares break. They are not gods – but they might as well be."
>
> – Master Paul Textborne,
> Codex Tandem Deorum.

In ages long past, the goddess Neph – firstborn and strongest of all the gods, lady of nature and all things untamed – was felled by her meek fellow deity Fik in an act of fury, a single snip of her scissors sending the wild goddess' head hurtling from the skies to rest for eternity in the northern lands of the Twisted Forest. Only one being could see the head of a fallen goddess, staining the land with thickly flowing green wylding blood, and turn it into a residence: the Archdruid, a demigod of unfathomable magical strength who once venerated Neph above all else. Once the would-be destroyer of all civilisation, the Archdruid emerged from his long solitude after the Druidic War, claiming Neph's skull as his sanctum, and the surrounding lands as his domain.

While his absolute rule is unquestioned, the Archdruid sets no laws, demands no tribute and establishes no grand fortresses. His is a ragtag, happenstance nation of monsters and druids who have been drawn from afar by the scent of his sheer power on the wind. Their pilgrimages have led them across vast continents and oceans, lusting for a mere taste of that might for themselves. The Archdruid's wellspring of blazing magical strength cascades from Neph's fallen head in an inexorable, inexhaustible tidal wave, and all who draw close have no choice but to fall to their knees in submission.

Towering Neph Spawn monstrosities without equal, veteran tribal warriors of horrific battles, wylding druids with the power to rend and fell cities: they are as cowering dogs in the Archdruid's presence, fearful of their master's slightest whisper. The realm lies drenched in this power, such that the trees and plants burst with vibrant and often grotesque shades, the sunlight stings the eyes of newcomers, and the magic-soaked air can enhance or twist wylding spells to strange purposes.

Archdruid

Of the Archdruid himself, few truths are known for certain. He is a master of wylding magic and a gifted creator of new forms of life. Many of the more powerful beasts roaming his realm were woven by the hands of the Archdruid. However, rumours abound that his faith in the goddess Neph – once a slavish devotion – has crumbled to dust, replaced by a new hunger. Akharon, the power of wylding, these fallible gods who are so easily killed; the Archdruid has come to suspect that hidden truths lie behind them all. His life's work is now to discover what resides beyond the realms: to depart Akharon, break through the heavens and transcend beyond the gods to find true truth.

The Archdruid considers precious few worthy of an audience, but he takes at least a fleeting interest in the goings on of his realm. He regularly visits loyal apex predators who nest and roam throughout his domain, taking samples of their flesh for his studies. He meets often with the vile fungimancer **Ixor Bruthstain**, who has contacts throughout the northern Whispering Jungle. While many Dracim exist within his realm, the Archdruid has no time for the dragon kings **Languorem** and **Terratorse**, as their agents are continuously attempting to steal his wylding. The demigod is aware of the kingdoms of Catla and Ire, but no diplomats of the civilised lands have dared to enter his realm in centuries. Pirates from the Kraken Isles are constantly landing on the shores of the realm to resupply and fight its many monsters, and see the land as unclaimed wild forest.

Griffon, Chimeras & New Goddesses

Griffons are majestic creatures who commonly have the body of a great cat and the head and wings of a bird of prey. They are unique Neph Spawn who were created by the Archdruid following the Druidic War and the death of Neph. It is said that they were made as a peace offering to the new goddess of nature – **Nijin** and **Jinin** – as a sign that wylding can be used to form beautiful creatures who can live at peace with the inhabitants of Akharon. They are renowned for their loyalty and are often sought after as mounts.

The smaller hippogriffs are a breed of griffon who are part stag in place of a great cat, and chimaeras are mutated monsters that are the result of unskilled wylding wielders attempting to create life.

The twin goddesses of life and death travel freely throughout all green wild lands, including the Archdruid's Realm. They were born from the wylding blood of their mother's severed head, and frequently return there to swim and recharge. They have a curious relationship with the Archdruid, as both appear to be keeping an eye on the other to ensure they are not causing trouble, and both insist on doing whatever they want whenever they want.

Fungimancers

- **Common Motivations:** Knowledge, power (wylding, rare plants).
- **True Nature:** Wylding wielders specializing in plant-based wylding magic.

"There are many kinds of druid, all worshipping nature in their own way. Those who scorn crafted tools; running wild and naked. Those who see civilisation as going too far; embracing tribalistic lives of huts, stone tools and animal hide coverings. The arcane focused, pushing wylding magic to new heights and depths that have not been seen since the Drudic War; creating new species, puppeteering fungi-filled corpses or mutating their own bodies. Some embrace the goddess Nijin and Jinin, though most remain loyal to the dead Neph, expecting her to rise again."

– Dietrich Greyscale,
Dracim wylding wielder.

Druidic magic is vast in its scope, granting its wielders innumerable strange, wonderous or disturbing pathways to power. One of these branches owes its existence to the Archdruid, who first developed the art to create shambling fodder for his vast armies: fungimancy. While the art itself has now spread far and wide, some of the most twisted and slavishly devoted fungimancers may be found within the Twisted Forest and far northern Whispering Jungle, spending their days refining their craft to create new and greater horrors.

Fungimancers are masters of organic magic, manipulating wylding-infused fungi to animate corpses and mutate the living. Considered an 'uncouth' branch of magic by upper-class mages, fungimancers are typically solitary figures, preferring to roam Akharon's wild and untamed regions where wylding resources are plentiful and peasants with pitchforks are few.

Fungizombies

Although their talents are many, fungimancers are primality known and feared for their ability to raise fungizombies. Grotesque and decaying, these minions are created by binding plants, vines and fungi into a corpse, then planting the barest seed of consciousness that makes them totally loyal to their summoner. Bursting with fungal spores and coated in layers of sickly mould, fungizombies are seen as an abomination by many, regardless of their creation method. A talented fungimancer will possess knowledge of specialised strains, striking fear into the hearts of even the most iron-willed soldiers, as no plague can be fought with sword and spear. These strains are as creative as they are insidious, including Spore Bursters, Myco Pouncers, Fungal Titans, Mold Chargers, Sporebearers, Lash Maws and Blight Graspers.

Rank-and-file strains are commonly stationed as guards or early warning fodder, blending perfectly with the undergrowth until they are ready to strike. Vast hordes have been used to lay siege to castles, rising again and again from death until the defenders are exhausted and depleted of all ammunition. The wild lands teem with one-of-a-kind experimental strains with fantastical powers that may catch even the most intrepid travellers off guard. While some are fecklessly abandoned as 'failed' strains, others have broken free of their fungimancer creators to find freedom, wreak havoc, or perhaps even claim territory of their own.

Ixthor & Sporegale

Of all practitioners, none have delved into fouler depths than Ixthor Bruthstain, a fungimancer said to be (albeit a distant) second only to the Archdruid himself. Known as 'the Druid's Right Hand' during the Druidic War, Bruthstain is one of very few who may boast of regular audiences with the Archdruid; even if these are fanciful embellishments, such is his reputation that none dare to question. Once an intelligent Neph Spawn, Ixthor Bruthstain has performed a multitude of spells on his own body over the centuries, achieving a grotesque form of immortality by transforming parts of himself into pulsing fungal masses. He is now more fungizombie than Spawn, and yet his twisted mind remains as sharp as a blade, ever clawing and grasping for more power.

Though a frequent guest in the Archdruid's domain, Ixthor dwells far beyond the northern Blasted Pass, deep within the Whispering Jungle. There, he resides in Sporegale, a haunting, otherworldly grove where towering fungi glow with eerie bioluminescence, casting shifting shadows across a forest floor of bones. Among the gnarled roots and moss-covered corpses, vile fungimancers come together once a month to perform dark, profane rituals for Bruthstain in exchange for his teachings.

Necromantic Allies

Obsessed with life and death, many fungimancers are thought of by many to be barely distinct from necromancers, spending lonely decades relentlessly honing spells of decay and resurrection. Their presence is considered by many to be a foul omen, leading to a vicious cycle of fungimancers driven into exile, succumbing to madness, and becoming the crazed, viciously powerful ne'er-do-wells that are the favoured villains in many a chilling campfire tale. Even a lone fungimancer may present a perilous challenge; what appears to be a wizened, half-mad hermit could be the commander of a fungal legion, ready to rise and swarm their enemies with a mere wave of a hand.

Out of a wellspring of darkness springs an unlikely friendship, as necromancy and fungimancy tessellate in surprising ways. Both are known for their love of solitude, their foul reputation among the common folk, and a lack of scruples when it comes to manipulating the dead. However, this final practice carries a crucial distinction, as necromancers are enchanters who deal in ghostly spirits, while fungimancers are wylding wielders who care only for the corpse. Both use death to achieve their goals, and yet having no quarrel over the spoils, it is not uncommon to see fungimancers and necromancers forming partnerships, which have been known to blossom into odd friendships over their shared antipathy for society and its petty moral foibles.

Twisted Chompers

- **Eternal Creator:** Neph.
- **Common Motivations:** Greed (food & plunder), territorial.
- **True Nature:** Sentient Nephilim munitions.

"Vile little monsters that are a scourage upon Akharon. May Neph be twice cursed in her grave for creating such a plague!"

– Adam Forester,
Kaltoran peasant who lost his farm to a Chomper raid.

Chompers are small black, green, red or yellow-skinned Spawn of Neph that are a little shorter than a child. They have large heads that are dominated by an enormously oversized mouth that is also stomach and anus, all atop a wiry body. They are disgusting and badly formed creatures with an inefficient digestive system that contributes to their ravenous nature. No matter how much a Chomper shoves into its rot and faeces-filled maw, its physiology ensures it will never be sated.

All vital organs are housed entirely within its thick skull cavity whilst its body below is nearly all muscle and nerves to ambulate and support its oversized head. Needing no organ cavities within the torso allows them to possess thick ropes of muscle which makes them not as physically fragile as they appear, despite their gaunt appearance.

It's easy to dismiss the threat posed by Chompers. The sight of a single easily frightened creature sniffing the air with an open mouth on the edge of a settlement is comical to behold with its little limbs somehow supporting an incongruously oversized head. Yet those who have faced them before know that this single creature is a threat to the entire settlement, for a Chomper scout will be the harbinger of a raiding party. Worse, if a single scout dies it will excrete a foul stench that will attract more Chompers.

When the attack finally comes it's always in great numbers of peons, scouts and warriors. Small feral and ferocious with a complete disregard for their own lives as they seek to kill, maim and steal indiscriminately, all the while throwing whatever food they can in their great wide crunching maw. Anyone unlucky enough to get close to this cavernous craw will see rows upon rows of needle-sharp incisors filled with remnants of fetid slowly digesting rotting flesh between each tooth.

A Chomper can crunch down with a force unlike any other creature of its size, the pressure of which will mangle some of the strongest armour. Rarely will it release its prey from this grip until it has torn off a suitable hunk of flesh. Survivors must be treated extensively for infection and disease thanks to the cornucopia of bacteria breeding within a Chomper's gullet.

Polymorphic Castes

Chompers come in five ant-like physical castes: **Larvae**, **Peon**, **Scout**, **Warrior** and the rare **Aspirant**. Most colonies produce random castes from the mating of adults, while aspirants are only produced in exceptionally large colonies. Larvae are little more than spheres with mouths, peons handle labour tasks (such as nest building and food collection), scouts locate resources (leaving pungent pheromone trails), and warriors raid and fight (and may be assisted by peons and scouts).

Evolving Colonies, Minds & Tools

Chompers are not only shaped by their physical castes, but their intellect and culture also grow to match the evolution of their colony. There are four broad stages of a nest that are defined by the tools they have stolen: **Primitive** (only rocks and clubs), **Basic** (pitchforks, shovels, spears, slings and tattered clothes), **Established** (swords, armour and fire) and **Advanced** (bows, basic machines and mounts). Some scholars have also noted historical tales of **Mythic** and **Twisted/Hobchomper** colonies that have access to techno-magic from divine ruins or a large source of body-warping wylding.

New colonies have primitive minds that think only of violence, food and reproduction. Successful colonies that have raided farm tools and weapons will develop minds that can contemplate basic crafting, crude tactics and simple resource management. Chompers are dependent on raiding and stealing tools to advance their colonies, as they can never learn to create more than simple tools and make crude adjustments to stolen equipment. They are a mocking parody of civilisation at best.

Aspirants

Most dangerous of all Chompers are the aspirant castes, rare variants that are born one in two hundred (more frequent if the colony has access to wylding).

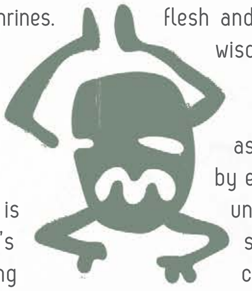
- **Assassin (Established+):** Skilled at stealth, poisons, tracking and assassinations. Their scouts are more dangerous.
- **Beastmaster:** Skilled at managing resources. Trains up animals and monsters to be mounts and combatants.
- **Brood Queen (access to wylding):** Very rare. Has a large body that can produce larvae of any caste (including aspirants).
- **Possessed:** Enslaved to a dark (ethereal or wraith) spirit or able to use enchantment magic. Has exotic powers and is often insane.
- **Putrid (Basic+):** Skilled with potions, poisons and tactics. Uses pheromones to convey complex ideas to other Chompers.
- **Ogre (access to wylding):** Very large and strong. Must be directed by other Chompers (often through chains and spear pokes) due to their stupidity.
- **Knight (Advanced):** Skilled at combat and crafting armour. Trains up animals and monsters to be mounts. Their warriors are more dangerous. Their scouts are less dangerous.
- **Rager:** Strong, aggressive and uses dual or large weapons. Their warriors are more dangerous.
- **Sourcerer (Advanced):** Skilled at techno-magic. Their scouts and warriors may use techno-magic weapons.
- **Sporemancer (access to wylding):** Skilled at wylding magic and able to create fungizombies.

Twisted Trolls

- **Eternal Creators:** Ugra'thok and Neph.
- **Common Motivations:** Personal power (martial & wisdom), survival, immortality (their dead to be eaten by other trolls).

> "The forest was silent. No bird called, no insect buzzed, as though the woods themselves were holding their breath. I crouched behind the gnarled roots of an ancient tree, watching. The trolls came lurching through the undergrowth, their fat and hairy forms grotesque in the half-light. Their faces – half-hidden by greasy, tangled hair – were nightmares made flesh, their teeth bared in wide bloody grins. A stink clung to them: damp fur, rotted meat, and something worse. One gnawed lazily on a severed arm, the bonecracking between its teeth. The forest watched them pass, the silence unbroken, save for the sound of teeth on bone."
>
> – Reinhard Mightyhorn,
> Dracim hunter.

Trolls are a curious breed of hairy monster that reside all over Akharon, from the frozen southern tundras to the twisted northern forests. They live in small thatch-roofed villages that are often surrounded by a simple palisade wall and are decorated with piles of bones, sacred cooking pots, etched clubs, and totemic shrines.



Few things are more unsettling than a charging troll, as they always attack – and even die – with a grin on their face. Life for troll is fighting, dying, eating and being reborn.

The unifying trait prevalent in every known troll tribe is cannibalism. It's shocking to outsiders but to trolls, it's their gateway to immortality. Each believes that by being consumed upon death, their strength, knowledge and experiences will pass on to their devourer, thus ensuring eternal life. There is no greater tragedy than for a troll's body to be destroyed before it can be consumed. In battle, the sight of a fallen comrade drives them into a frenzy and each creature will fight with renewed eagerness for victory so that they might be among those to dine upon their kin and the choicest of foes.

During combat, trolls will make use of primitive weapons, such as clubs, spears, slings and nets. They also have a fondness for pets, traps and group tactics. Their hunting parties are often small and will consist of a few experienced trolls along with a number of disposable **Rawbloods** who have not yet tasted troll flesh.

Immortal Leaders

On occasion, a particularly powerful troll personality will take over the mind of the one who eats them. This has given rise to the myth that trolls can regenerate from death and must be killed with fire or acid. In truth, the only way to permanently defeat such a powerful being is to hide away its corpse, as it will never fully decompose and burning it up does not work. The greatest of these troll personalities – who have often existed since the Age of Darkness – are known as **Troll Immortals** and are immensely powerful beings of fury, cunning and martial skill. Sacrificing yourself to become an Immortal is a holy task that only the largest trolls are allowed to complete.

Their personalities are occasionally split over multiple bodies if a single troll does not consume their corpse. These multiple forms of the same Immortal never last long, as they are driven to fight and eat one another until there is only one.

Holy Warriors

When a troll pack is utterly defeated their tribe will send in teams of young **Snatchers** whose sole role is to sneak to empty battlefields, beast dens, or behind enemy lines to recover corpses of fallen great trolls. Successful Snatchers are heroes amongst their kin and will often become holy soothsayer – known as **Soul Snatchers** – who are gifted with arcane powers over the spirits by drinking holy blood from a powerful soothsayer.

Trolls have a distinctive and complex religion that has never been fully understood by outsiders. They appear to worship the Eternal gods, especially Ugra'thok and Jop Jop, though their perspective of these two deities is unique. To the trolls they are the same god (who some call Ugra'Jop); Ugra'thok is its dark side of violence, cunning, flesh and consumption, while Jop Jop is the light side of rebirth, wisdom, community and health.

Trolls are disappointed by other cultures and see them as fools for keeping themselves dumb, ignorant and sickly by eating the flesh of animals and not each other. They do not understand that other species do not have their powers. Trolls see themselves as holy warriors dining on the unworthy corpses of heretics to cure the planet of a great infection of ignorance and sickness.

Allies & Foes

Trolls are incredibly social creatures and love working alongside companions, and this may include other creations of Ugra'thok and Jop Jop. Such as giants, chompers and spirits.

Elementals are the ancient enemy of the troll, as they can not be eaten and those who die at their hands can never be reborn. Combats with an elemental are one of the few things that can cause a troll to feel fear, and entire tribes will move their homes if they are threatened by such creatures.

The mad **Children of Pol** are also a hated foe, as their metal bodies can not be eaten and some of their weapons will disintegrate a troll's entire body.

- **Truth:** Trolls are a type of Nephilim who were engineered to make use of genetic memory genes from Kaltorans as a means to preserve combat skills and intel from dead scouts. The physical nodes that carry these memories are spread throughout a Troll's body and can be retrieved through consumption. Trolls can also eat Kaltorans to gain some of their genetic memories.

Warped Kingdom

- See Dracim write-up from pg: 12.
- See Dragon write-up from pg: 132.
- See history of Pol's Rest & Strongholdon pg: 69.
- See Rise of the Dragon Languorem write-up from pg: 70.

- **Ruler:** Languorem (Dragon King).
- **Capital:** Neph's Ruin.
- **Subject Species:** Primarily Dracim.
- **Cultural Notes:**
  - Nation was formed after Languorem's corruption forced residents out of Pol's Rest after the Druidic War.
  - Only trades with other dragons and is at war with all others
    - Constant fights with the Drasong Clan.
    - Regular trade with the dragon king Terratorse.
  - Dracim residents primarily live in small camps.
- **Legal Notes:**
  - Might makes right.
    - Languorem rules supreme.
- **Economic Strengths:** Food, soldiers, wylding.

> "In the Twisted Realm, reality dances with fantasy and the very ground beneath your feet is a riddle waiting to be unravelled. It is a place where curiosity is both a gift and a curse, and those who venture forth may find themselves forever entwined in the surreal embrace of this uncanny land of wylding magic."
>
> – Helga Jadecrest,
> Creet scout.

In the curious tapestry of nations, there exists a kingdom whispered of in hushed tones, known only as the Twisted Realm, the domain of the draconic demigod Languorem. It is a land where the laws of nature have abandoned their solemn duties, giving birth to an eerie dreamscape of fog, spores, eldritch plants, great alien spires and an unsettling quilt of creeping organic matter. All subtly wriggling and pulsing with grotesque life. Those who venture close can feel the whispering caress of this otherworldly domain, like a lover's touch turned cold and clammy.

It was not always so. The valley of Pol's Rest was once green and fertile, the last sanctuary of civilisation after the Druidic War threatened all with extermination. While the followers of the Archdruid used their wydling magic to replace cities, roads and castles with green forests, blue rivers and white-capped mountains… the vile Languorem spat in the eye of his goddess when he used her wylding gifts to twist the land into a nightmare that mocks both civilisation and nature.

The people who once called this land home were forced to flee, abandoning their towns, fields and mines to Languorem's spreading corruption and Dracim warriors. The great fortress city of Stronghold – the birthplace of techno-magic and final resting place of the metal god Pol – was the last to fall. Its majestic white walls and towering stone spires now form a hell-like gate into the Twisted Realm, not sealing it in, but keeping prying eyes out.

The great dragon king has not made any overt moves to invade the neighbouring Kingdom of Ire, but spores from his corruption regularly float across the mountains to take root in distant lands. Regular patrols and the surrounding mountains with their Elemental occupants offer some protection. Though it often falls to sell-swords, mercenaries and would-be heroes to cleanse the land of these evil seeds and the monsters they spawn.

Culture

The Twisted Realm is an alien world of roaming monsters and eldritch plants. The Dracim are its primary occupants with a culture, though there are also dragons and the occasional intelligent Neph Spawn. The Dracim of this land are slaves to Languorem's will and live only to develop his kingdom.

Feeding Spires, Work Camps, War Camps & Towns

The Twisted Realm does not have acres of farmland, stretches of intersecting roads and built-up cities like other nations. The land is so flush with organic resources that very few of its inhabitants work to feed the population. Camps are built up around Feeding Spires that excrete a mead-like substance that can sustain thousands of Dracim workers. Those who do work as farmers, only do so to feed their masters who have a taste for flesh, to produce specific goods that are used in manufacturing (such as carapace) or to raise beastal mounts (such as drakes).

Camps are also built up around mines to extract ore, eldritch forests to produce lumber and key defensive chokepoints. Most Dracim live within these resource and war camps, as their towns are small and infrequent. All are well-defended with crude walls and all of their citizens are capable fighters.

Some live outside these camps and work as hunters, beast wranglers, patrolling guardians or wylding collectors. They are commonly guided by an arcane Twister.

Twisters

Dracim with the ability to manipulate wydling magic are known as Twisters. They are responsible for ensuring the health of the Dracim and the realm: including its many wondering monsters and strange plants. They may also be called upon to organise teams to harvest wylding that grows within the Twisted Realm's many creatures and plants.

Twisters are especially gifted at altering and enhancing the physical abilities of Dracim and other Neph Spawn. This power extracts a heavy toll from their bodies and has been known to transform them into gibbering monsters.

Wyrm Tyrants

The leaders of each region are known as Wyrm Tyrants. They are usually very old and heavily mutated Dracim that have fought in numerous battles. Becoming a Wyrm Tyrant is the highest honour that a Dracim can achieve in life, and is the reason why so many of them are eager to fight in Languorem's wars.

Their lives are relatively easy and filled with comfort as Languorem's realm takes care of itself. The Wyrm Tyrants' primary role is to keep their Dracim in fighting order and to personally protect the kingdom if it is attacked.

Neph's Ruin

The capital of the Warped Realm is not a city, but a pulsating mound of tendrilled nests. A grotesque parody of avian architecture with purple and blue appendages stretching up the sides of the surrounding mountains and piercing deep down into the earth. The roost of Languorem and his many dragon queens swarm with activity as Dracim caretakers clamber over it like insects to collect up and take away its many eggs.

Clutches of Dracim eggs are dispersed across the kingdom to hatch into adolescent warriors and workers, while baby dragons are dragged kicking and crying into caves to be buried alive so that they may devolve into drakes and wyverns.

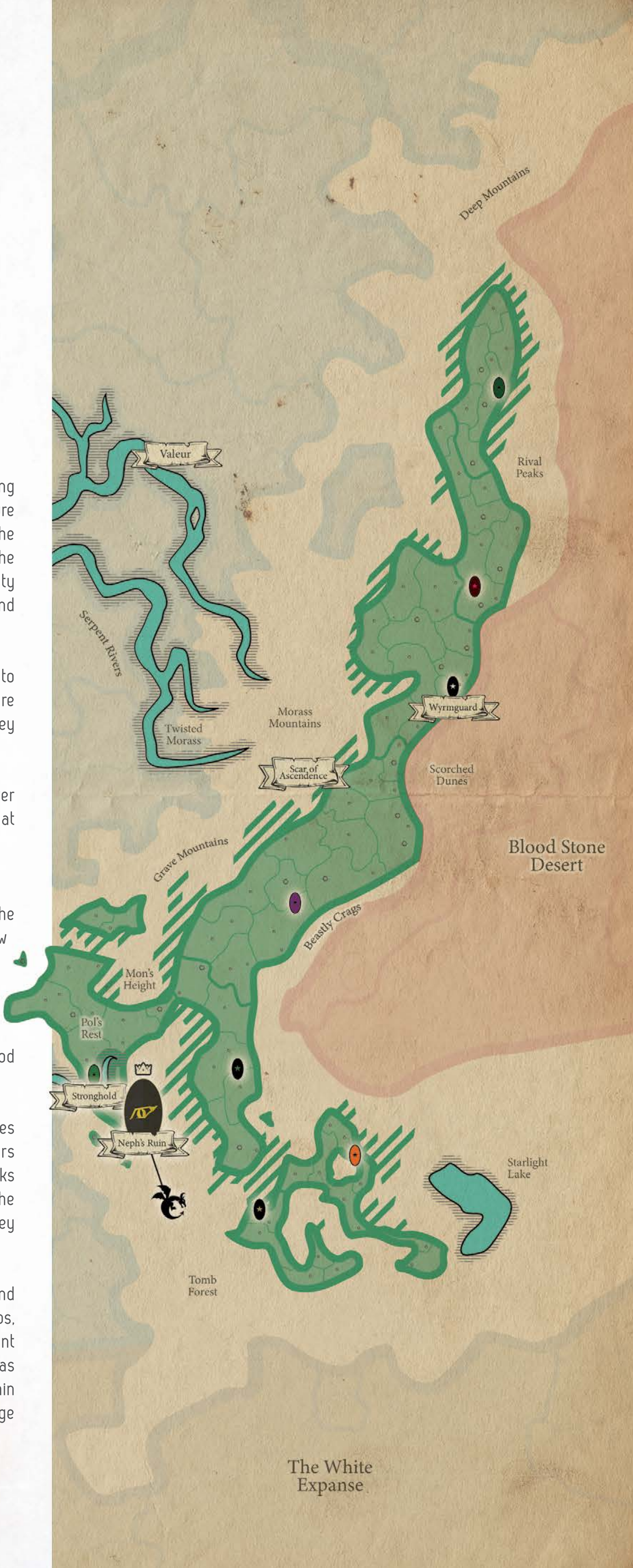
Neph's Ruin is a vile and twisted monument to suffering and power that no outsider has perceived in centuries. None can say what secrets or horrors it holds within its malevolent cavities.

Stronghold

A former bastion of civilisation, techno-magic and piety to the fallen Eternal god Pol, the great fortress city of Stronghold now decays under Dracim occupation. Its white stone streets are coated in the living rot that covers the Warped Realm. Tendrils are slowly breaking down its grand temples, towers and noble statues as the brutish Dracim paint vile runes across her marred walls and drape her in tattered banners to the glory of their demigod dragon king.

Erect and upright, the great metal arm of the dead god Pol reaches for the stars at the centre of the city and still occasionally flickers with arcane power. Long has Languorem desired the divine sparks of the dead god of magic for himself, but expeditions down into the buried god's body by the Dracim are rarely embarked upon, lest they stir the wrath of the slumbering Children of Pol within.

Stronghold is the only true city within the Warped Realm, and its empty buildings are slowly being transformed into workshops, warehouses, barracks and arcane laboratories. Its wyrm tyrant **Ghalsrock the Toothy** is a Dracim monstrosity that is as clever as he is ugly. Ghlasrock is eager to uncover what secrets lie within Stronghold and the body of Pol, and to establish a garrison large enough to ward off any attack from the Kingdom of Ire.



Pol's Rest

The valley of Pol's Rest is nestled between the Elemental-filled Grave Mountain range, the towering Mon's Height and the once-majestic city of Stronghold. Some mistakingly see it as a dead land due to the thick layers of Languorem's corruption, numerous ruins and small settlements, but nothing could be further from the truth.

The land is dotted with Dracim training camps, resource and workshop outposts, watchtowers, expansive mines, roaming monsters and regular Dracim patrols. The entire Warped Realm is fed by the resources generated from this single valley. Its entire Dracim population could be slaughtered and the land burned, and all would revitalised within a single month.

Wyrmguard Fortress

Perched upon the desolate borderlands between the Warped Kingdom and the Blood Stone Desert, the fearsome fortress of Wyrmguard stands alone against the armies of the Drasong Clan and their powerful desert spirits. Encased in walls of purple and black flesh, as impenetrable as stone and steel, the fortification projects formidable military power across the land. Beneath its sinewy ramparts and carapaced towers, a labyrinthine network of tunnels weaves through the earth, extending the reach of Wyrmguard's influence like a dark, subterranean web. These winding passages are whispered to be the veins through which the fortress breathes, and allow the Dracim to move unseen and unhindered.

Rising ominously above the macabre living structure is the **Spire of Tyrany**, where notable Dracim warriors are transformed by the vile wylding magics of the Twisters into Wyrm Tyrants. The lower **Infernal Halls** are a network of rooms that are filled with Drakes, monsters, guards and traps to ward off intruders. The windowless middling **Blighted Sanctum** is home to the Twisters, and is where worthy Dracim are chained down as they are transformed into mighty Wyrm Tyrants. The upper **Miasmic Alcove** is without stairs and may only be accessed by those with wings. It is home to visiting Dragon Queens and houses the throne of the Wyrmguard's commander: **Jrack Thundertusk**.

Fey of the Starlight Lake

Bathed in an ethereal glow and shrouded in perpetual mist, the large Starlight Lake shimmers like a celestial jewel nestled amidst towering snow-capped mountains. Its crystal-clear waters offer respite to all who come in peace, and madness to those who harbour ill-intent. The lake and its surrounding lands are home to a multitude of whimsical fey beings, and mark the southern end of the Warped Kingdom.

Throughout history, the Fey have offered rest to many, including deserting Dracim, Ashen Creet returning to their homeland from the Kingdom of Ire, wayward Legion warriors from the southern White Expanse, Twi-Far slavers from the Blood Stone Desert, and even mighty dragons and other Divine Servants. Some mistakingly see the Fey of the Starlight Lake as a neutral force in the world, but this could not be further from the truth. They extract dreams and memories as payment for their respite and have been known to make deals with both Languorem and the Drasong Clan at different times. They are mercurial and deal in strange methods of exchange, but they are mercenaries at heart and have secret ambitions.

Threats

The Warped Kingdom is a nation without true allies and its very nature pits it against all neighbours. Though it is a powerful realm that may be impossible to ever truly conquer.

Children of Pol

Beneath Stronghold and Pol's Rest lies the broken body of the dead god Pol. Inside his metal corpse are many techno-magical wonders, but also numerous deadly Children of Pol to awaken.

Drasong Clan

The Warped Kingdom and the Drasong Clan are in open war against one another. The Dracim rely on the weight of numbers, while the Twi-Far depend on their speed, power and spirits. The Scorched Dunes and canyons of the Beastly Crags along the borderlands regularly flow with blood and are strewn with the corpses of hundreds of battles. On occasion, a powerful Drasong will travel deep within hostile territory to burn away key eldritch plants that send spores out into their desert.

Elementals

The Elementals love to eat all Neph Spawn, including Dracim and Languorem's corruption. They are drawn to their great king within the Morass Mountains and the Grave Mountains around Pol's Rest. However, they dare not push into the Warped Kingdom as their dead are difficult to replace.

Rival Dragons

Almost all Great Dragon Kings have sworn fealty to Languorem. They send him gifts in exchange for wylding power (including the ability to create their own Dracim) and to avoid his wrath. But these are bonds forged from greed and fear, for none are truly loyal. Spies, thefts and political games from all sides are common. Roostless dragon queens are welcomed by Languorem, but not by his existing Great Queens who are quick to kill all rivals (including their own children) before they secure a place within the realm.

Thieves & Monster Hunters

The Warped Kingdom is technically at peace with the Kingdom of Ire and the Southern Legion Tribes. Though, thieves and monster hunters regularly travel into the Warped Realm across the mountains or through underground tunnels in search of plunder and adventure. Languorem allows them to do as they will as serve the role of training up his Dracim and will commonly die before they can return to their homelands.

Dragons

- See Dracim write-up from pg: 12.

- **Eternal Creator:** Neph.
- **Cultural Notes:**
  - Commonly fear and dislike other dragons.
  - Commonly use Dracim, Drakes, Wyverns and other kinds of Neph Spawn as servants.
  - Motivated by greed and a desire to dominate others.
  - Nests are ruled by a dragon king, possibly with multiple dragon queens.

"Dragons are creatures born of a primal age, with hearts devoid of all virtue. Prideful and cruel, they seek only destruction, their greed insatiable. With every roar, they defy the heavens, for they bow to no god. Their wings blot out the suns, their breath melts all before them and they have no word for mercy."

– Cratinus Lowhill,
Introduction to Codex Dracanus.

The great dragons of Akharon are fearsome, serpentine monstrosities, creatures of primaeval dread, muscle and elemental power. Their scaly hides glisten like darkened jewels, mirroring the shadows of the abyss and their eyes burn with an evil malevolence that harks back to the dawn of time. These ancient wyrms are wreathed in the enigmatic shroud of myth as they slumbered for a thousand years before they were awoken by the scent of wylding magic during the Druidic War.

Dragons are innately greedy, lazy, proud, selfish and vengeful creatures. Their armour is stronger than forged steel, their arcane breath melts stone, they scheme in decades and sit upon mounds of wealth that are guarded by armies of Neph Spawn monsters and other lesser dragon kind.

Arcane Sleep

When dragons were first created by the goddess Neph during the primal Age of Darkness where they had few rivals. When Neph killed the god of magic – Pol – she absorbed some of his abilities and transferred them to her dragons; gifting them with exotic arcane powers, such as the ability to breathe lighting, fire or ice. The dragons gorged themselves on this divine meal and a great wave of exhaustion washed over them. They burrowed into the ground and slumbered for a thousand years as their bodies digested their arcane banquette.

During this time of rest, their bodies and minds weakened, and when they awoke to the smell of wylding power during the Druidic War they were almost ready to transform into animalistic beasts. The wylding unleashed by the druids saved them, especially the large amount gathered by the great dragon king **Languorem** who transformed himself into a multi-headed demigod.

It is not known what plans Neph had for her dragons, as she was slain by the goddess Fik less than a century after their awakening. The dragons of the current era are not the same as those of ancient myth. These are masters of elemental magic, serve no god, give birth to thousands of Dracim servants and are building miniature nations for themselves.

Nests & Tetramorphism

Two curious draconic topics that are commonly discussed by scholars are their sexual tetramorphism and the social structures of their nests. Roosted males and females are known as kings and queens, while their younger counterparts are referred to as princes and princesses.

Dragons are treated horribly by their parents, as they are entombed alive at a young age until they succumb to Neph's Decline (pg: 15) and devolve into animal stupidity and their bodies mutate into a lesser form; that of a male drake or female wyvern. They are then enslaved and used as disposable fodder to defend the nest or act as beasts of burden. On rare occasions, a young dragon breaks free to lose their mind in the wild, partners up to create a small nest of their own, or a princess joins a rival roost to become a queen.

Most nests consist of a dragon pair, while the great kings have dozens of queens and thousands of slaves. Queens produce very few royal eggs but will gestate and lay hundreds of smaller Dracim eggs within a single month after being infused with wylding magic.

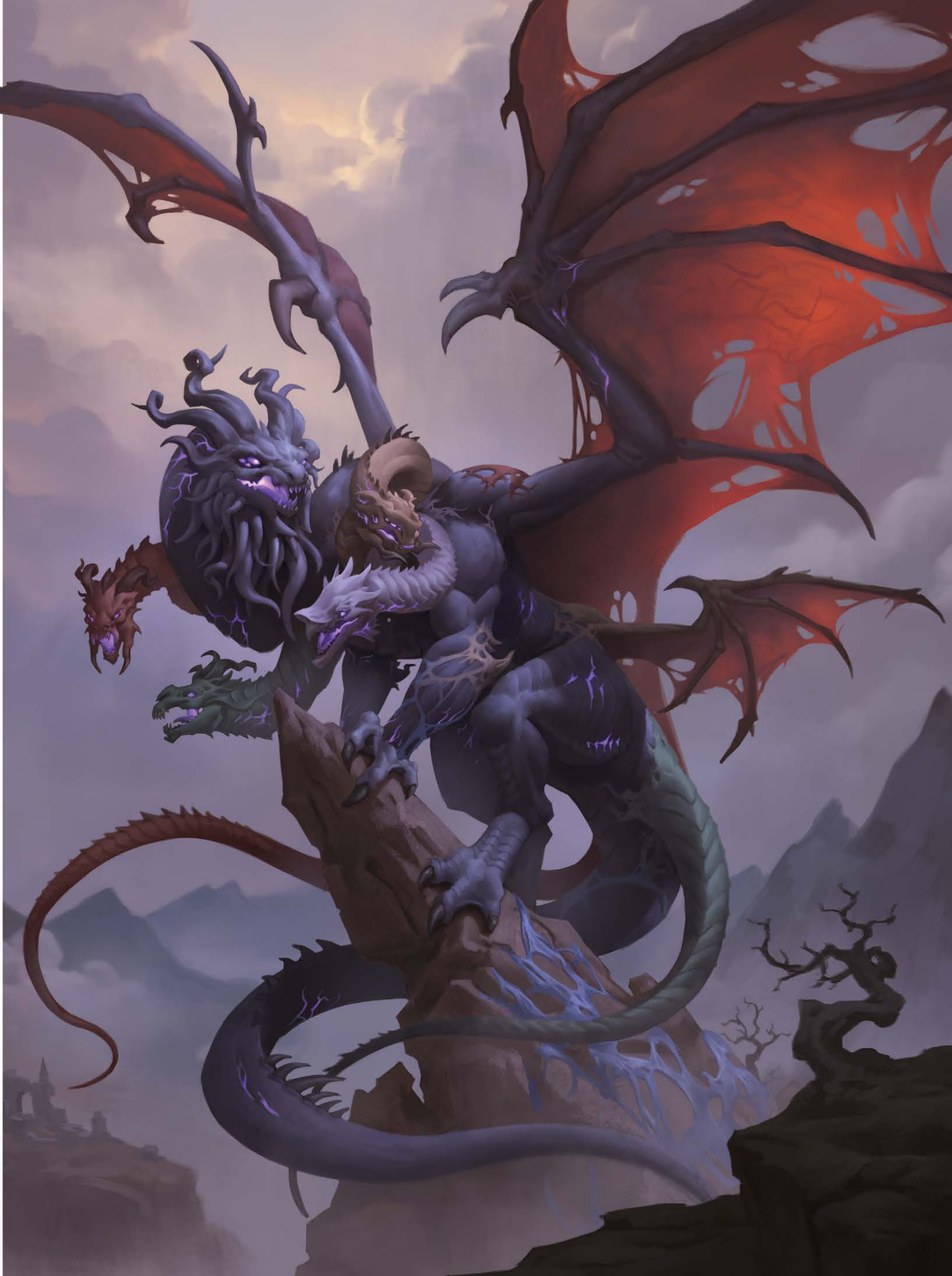
Dragon nests vary greatly based on the culture of its royals and their environment. Most are a network of caves with chambers set aside for eggs, food, waste, rest and servants. With the rise of the Dracim they are becoming increasingly complex and include more buildings, traps, animal pens, homes and other markings of civilisation. The cultural centre of all dragon nests is the hoard; a mound of coins and arcane artefacts for the king to rest upon.

Kings

These monsters are the undisputed rulers of the dragon world as they are larger, hold the ability to prevent mutation into lesser draconic forms, and their arcane powers are more destructive. They are easily identified from their female counterparts as they have forearms, while the queen's arms are also their wings.

Kings do not tolerate the presence of competition and will kill rival kings and nomadic princes. They are incredibly intelligent, but also deeply lazy creatures who prefer to have their minions fight for them, avoid nesting near threats, procrastinate and delegate most tasks to underlings. They are also greedy and love to raid nearby lands for wealth, food, wylding and monsters to subjugate.

There are seven living great dragon kings (pg: 14) that have slumbered since the Age of Darkness. The great dragon **Doijn** (pg: 197) was killed by Jötnar giants and Trolls as he slept, turning him into a ghostly wraith. The dragon demigod, **Languorem**, has killed and absorbed the bodies of multiple rival great kings who sought to steal away his enormous supply of wylding magic.



Queens

Mature female dragons are smaller and have no forearms, but they are faster due to their large wings and elastic muscles. Their arcane abilities also tend to be more complex than the raw might of kings. Queens are even more aggressive and territorial than males and it is they who break young royals into their lesser forms, and it is they who patrol their lands to kill and enforce the established social order within a nest.

Drakes

Male dragons who have succumbed to Neph's Decline will mutate into drakes; amphibious reptilian creatures with the mind of an animal. They have large heads, short necks, four legs, a long tail and stumpy vestigial wings. Their size can vary from two to over twenty meters in length. Most are slothful and perpetually grumpy, but they have powerful jaws, armoured hides that will deflect most blades and a powerful breath attack that can melt flesh.

While stationed at a dragon's nest, these drakes typically assume the role of sentinels and entrance guards. Over time, their voracious appetite causes them to balloon in size, compelling them to laboriously drag their bulging bellies across the ground. Food is brought to them to keep their arcane breath strong, and they are awakened by vigilant Dracim guards when they are needed to fight. Some do not even aim their attacks and rely on Dracim handlers to direct their heads and prod them to produce an elemental burst. They are pitiful creatures that spend most of their lives asleep upon rocks that are covered in bones and viscus from their former meals.

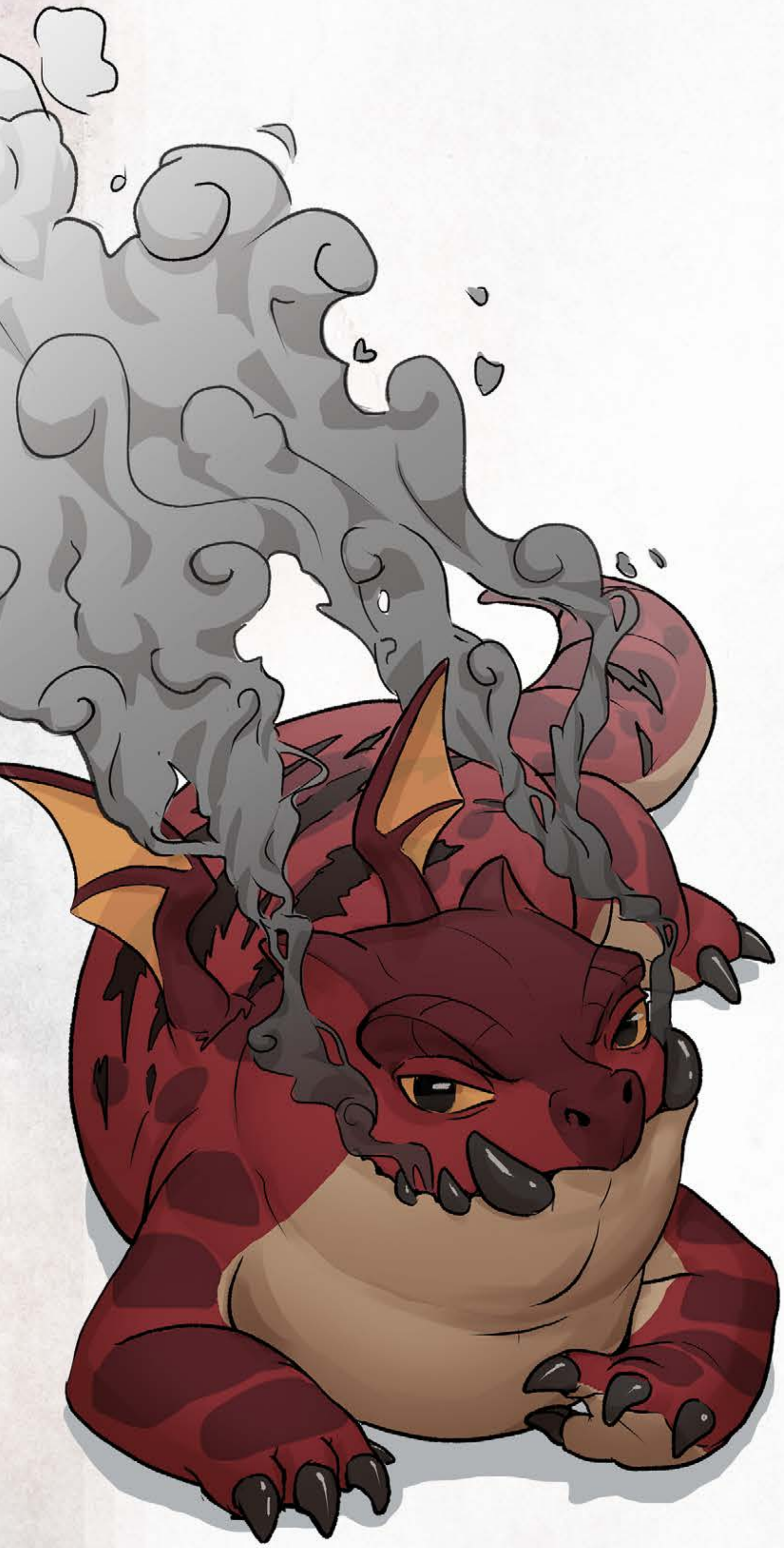
In the wild drakes exhibit a tendency to congregate in small packs, often forming a hierarchy that descends down from a dominant alpha leader. They seek refuge in shallow caves or marshy waters for their dens, and employ ambush tactics to catch prey. They share an innate kinship with their fellow drakes, typically avoiding conflicts with their own kind and even showing restraint when confronted by wyverns who will immediately attack them.

Wild drakes are far healthier than their bound counterparts, and have been known to be captured and trained as mounts for brave riders who recognize their unique potential.

Scars & Eggs

Wyverns and drakes may engage in mating, yet their relationship remains strictly transient, as wyverns will neither cohabit nor tolerate the presence of drakes for even the briefest of intervals beyond their usefulness.

Wyverns exhibit a remarkable ability to discern a drake egg's presence months before it hatches. In an act of deliberate cruelty, the wyvern will unceremoniously cast the egg from her lofty nest, subjecting it to the mercy of scavengers and the harsh elements. Drakes, driven by an instinctual desire to protect their unborn kin, will endure relentless wyvern attacks to retrieve these precious eggs in their mouths and tenderly carry them to safety. The backs of nearly all wild drakes are a sea of scar tissue.



Drake.

Wyverns

Female dragons who have mutated into their lesser form are known as wyverns: gaunt, dragon-like creatures with crazed animal minds, large wings, a long tail and numerous spines along their body. They are deadly beasts that are quick to attack and favour hit-and-run tactics.

They have no arcane powers or breath attack, but are viciously territorial and poisonous. Their bodies are often scarred from fighting with other creatures (including other wyverns), and it is not uncommon for them to be blind in one eye or to have lost the use of a limb from their ceaseless conflicts.

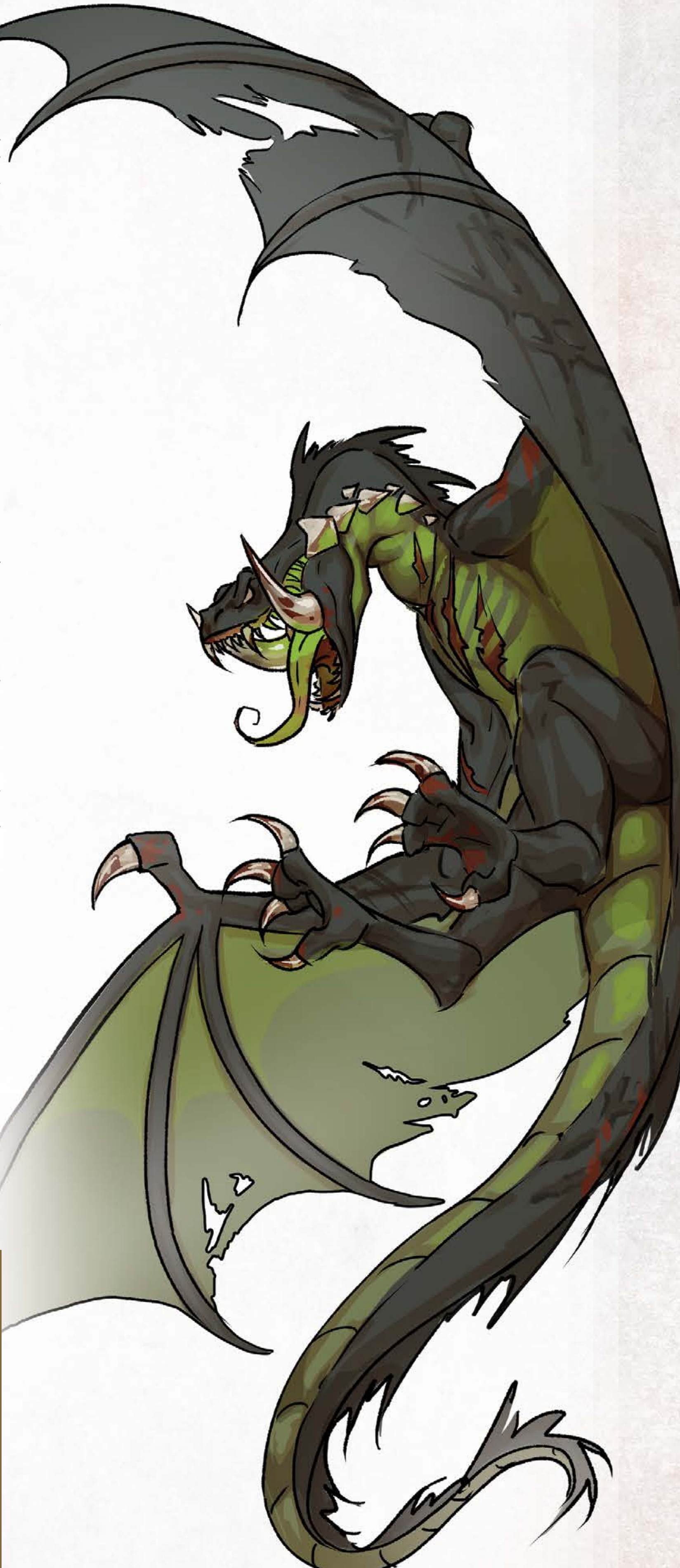
The only creature able to effortlessly control a wyvern without the use of magic is a dragon queen, though only in short bursts. Even dragon kings are unable to direct their fury and will be immediately attacked on sight if a queen does not hold them back. Wyverns who are bound to a dragon's nest are kept in cages and blinded by a hood when they are not out patrolling at the direction of a queen. Dracim handlers will cover their enemies in the scent of a dragon king before unleashing a wyvern, as this will drive them into a fury against the intended target.

There are rumours that Languorem is breeding new kinds of wyverns that are smaller but can be trained. If this is true it will give him a dangerous military advantage over his rivals.

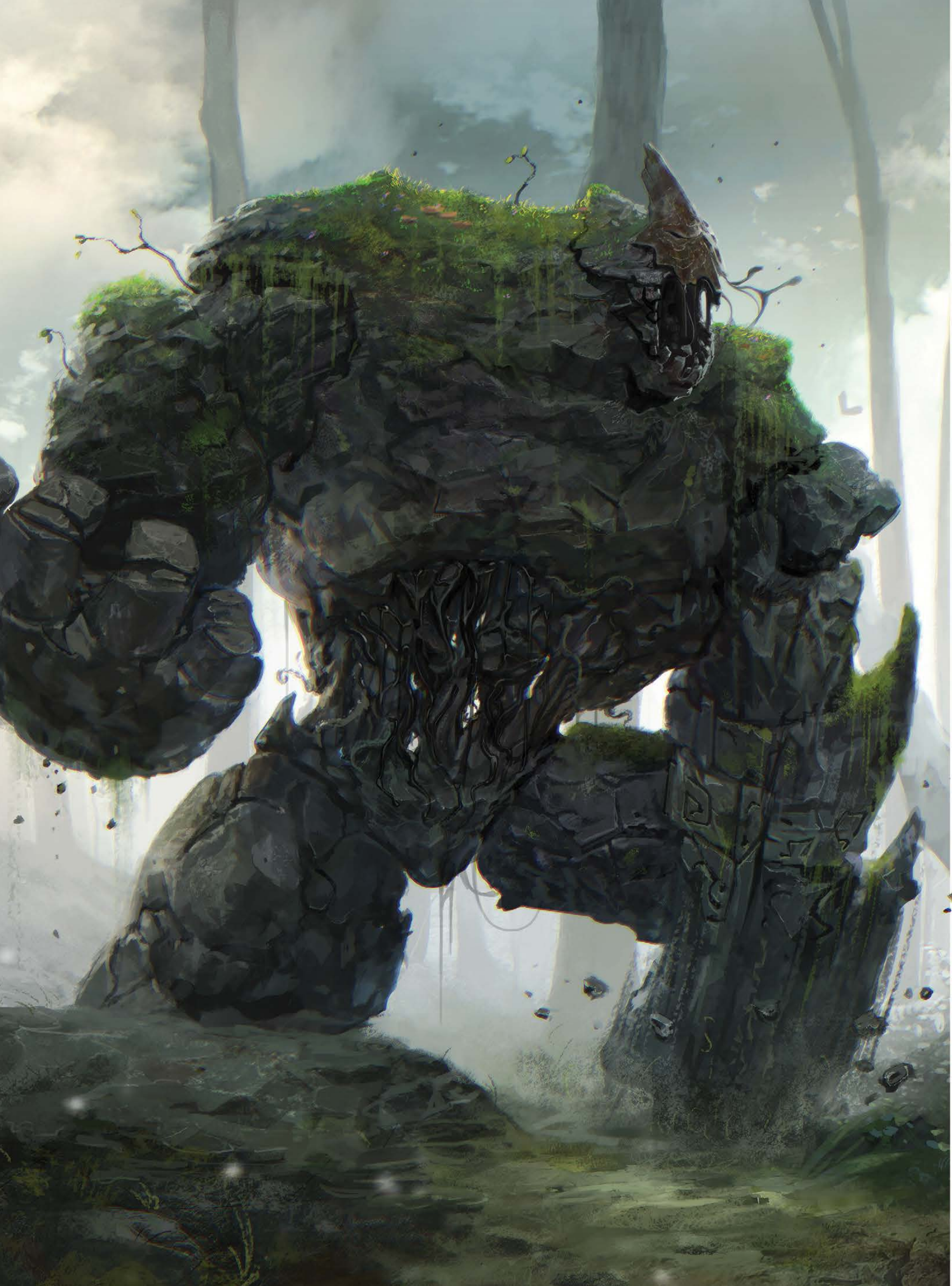
In the wild, wyverns are solitary beings and are notorious for killing far more prey than they consume. This ruthless behaviour will desolate a region and only becomes worse during nesting season as they extend the size of their claimed land. Wyvern nests tend to be on cliff sides or atop large trees on hills. Wyverns may breed with drakes, but they will only care for eggs that carry a wyvern, and she will only care for these young until they are able to fly. At this point, she will drive them off as she tries to eat and kill them. Young wyverns almost have a sixth sense for their mother's rage, and are very skilled at avoiding her attacks.

- **Truth:** Dragons are Nephilim, and the kings are Genocrats. All powerful dragons use wylding (which can be mutagenic fluid, flesh rejuvenation fluid or bio-weapon munitions) to alter their genetics to gain power and to avoid going feral. Drakes and wyverns are dragons who have gone feral.

> "In the misty northern fields, I stumbled upon a herd of thud cow corpses, all felled by wyvern poison and claw. Curiously, these cattle were not devoured as one might expect from such a monster. Instead, the beast had taken only a few gnarled bites and moved on. Such a creature has no place in the natural order. They kill and ravage the land while giving nothing back."
>
> – Farai Hwekwete,
> priest of Nijin and Jinin.



Wyvern.



Grave & Morass Mountain Elementals

- See Elemental overview on pg: 40.
- See Zowilza, Elemental King write-up from pg: 203.
- See history of the wounding of Ugra'thok on pg: 66.

- **Ruler:** Zowilza (Earth Elemental).
- **Cultural Notes:**
  - Strongly motivated by Hunger (especially for Neph Spawn and wylding).
  - Zowilza resides in the Scar of Ascendence.
- **Legal Notes:**
  - Elementals are governed by Zowilza, Dryads and Nymphs.

"Heed my words: The demigods of Akharon tremble before no mortal weapon or magic. But the Archdruid, Languorem and Neph's spear Ire will find no such protection against the voracious maws of the Elementals. Their black ooze consume all and they yearn to devour wylding above all else."

– Leontius Greyland,
Legion seer.

Throughout their existence, the Elementals have remained scattered across Akharon – isolated, alone, and gradually fading from the world. In the aftermath of the Druidic War, thousands were drawn to the Grave and Morass Mountains, lured by the tantalizing scent of wylding and the abundance of Neph Spawn to devour.

Yet, even in this land of plenty, they failed to thrive. Despite the guidance of many Nymphs and Dryads, their inherent nature repeatedly betrayed them. Their insatiable hunger led them towards danger and they turned on one another, consuming their own kind to grow in size.

The residents of the Kingdom of Ire are grateful for the Elementals, as they are neither malicious nor inherently selfish. These creatures serve as a vital defence, holding back the corrupting spores and draconic raiders of the Warped Kingdom. Yet, their insatiable hunger makes them an ever-present danger. Large Elementals are highly intelligent but less able to control their hunger. Smaller Elementals are less ravenous but unintelligent and unpredictable.

The Elementals would have remained a footnote in the books of history, had it not been for the arrival of their king, **Zowilza**. A colossal Elemental who resides within the gorge known as the **Scar of Ascendence**. Unlike all of his size before him, Zowilza has so far controlled his hunger, maintaining both his immense power and a mind unrivalled in all of Akharon. With his boundless wisdom and intellect, he has taken it upon himself to lead the Elementals away from the brink of extinction, forging a path of survival and purpose for his beleaguered people.

Crafted Bodies

Small Elementals create bodies for themselves out of immediately available materials, such as dirt and leaves. Larger Elementals devote significant effort into their forms, carefully sculpting materials such as stone and wood around and into their dark oozing cores. When an Elemental's body is destroyed, their dark ooze can be seen fleeing to hide and start the arduous process of creating a new body.

Earth
Elementals made of earthen materials such as sand, clay and stone are the most common. Their bodies are durable and easily repaired. Their forms tend to be large and they crush their prey with massive fists and hurled boulders.

Metal & Magic
Are among the rarest of their kind as they require safe access to an ancient battlefield, divine ruin or the bodies of slain Children of Pol. There are also legends of techno-mages forming pacts with Elementals, crafting giant articulated vessels of armour and magic for them in exchange for their services. Such deals rarely end well for the mage.

Mimics
Extremely cunning Elementals who have learned to adapt to civilisation and their materials have been known to disguise themselves as chests, doors or furniture. When touched they will reveal their true nature and seek to devour their prey with monstrous maws of steel teeth.

Water & Ice
Water-dwelling Elementals are relatively common, drawn to the abundance of food and the minimal threats beyond their own kind. However, crafting bodies from water or ice presents significant challenges, demanding years of practice and a dark ooze core of considerable size.

- **Truth:** Elementals are Zhou who have been genetically altered to cripple their growth; forcing them to create bodies for themselves out of available materials.

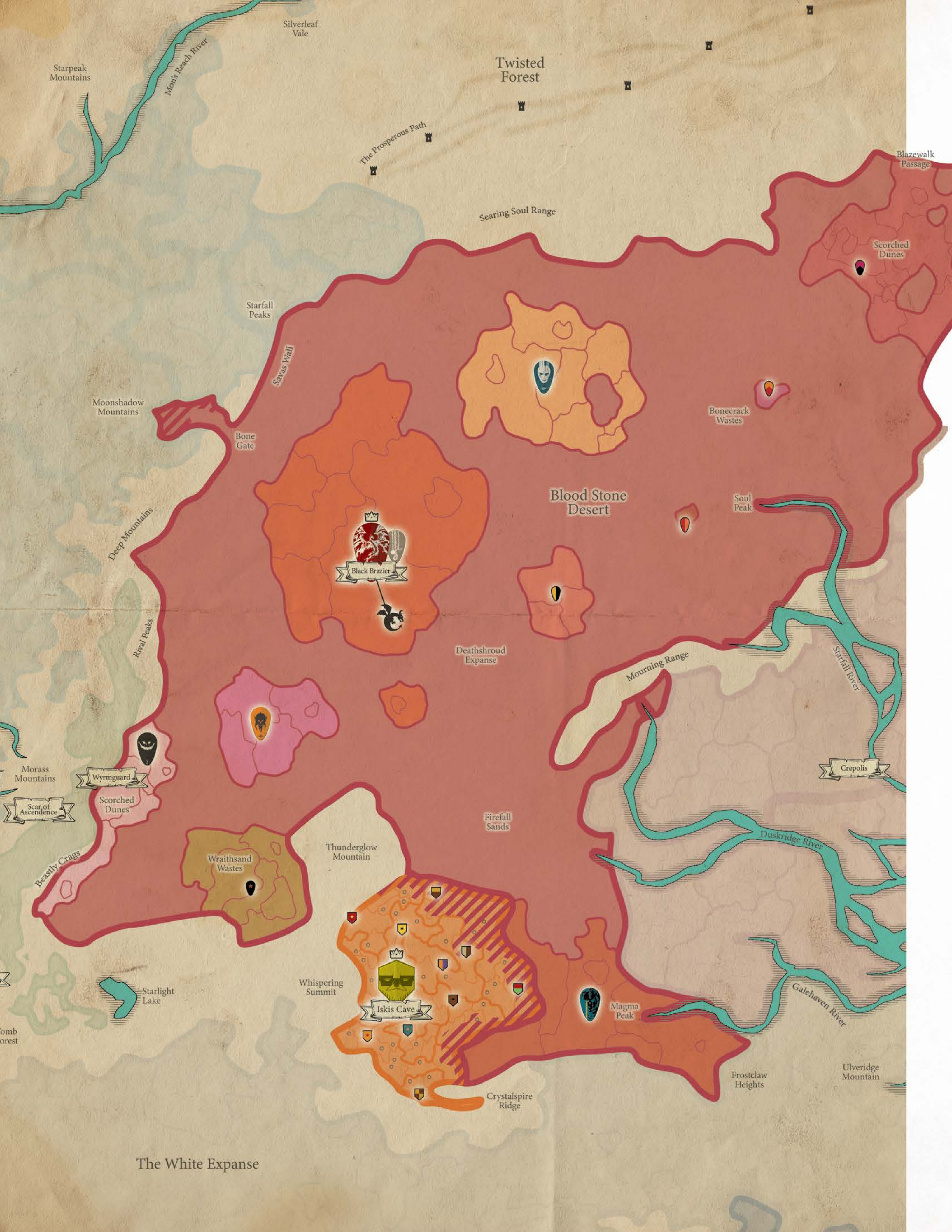
Dryads & Nymphs

- See Dryad & Nymph overview on pg: 40.

The Dryads and Nymphs are primal yet cultured beings, dedicated to the care of all Elementals throughout Akharon. The wisest of those in the Morass and Grave Mountains serve as counsellors to Zowilza, and convey his wisdom and instructions across the world through trusted messengers.

Mountain Dryads attach themselves to a specific region and a singular grand tree where they build their home. Their knowledge of their domain is unmatched as they are familiar with almost every tree and rock. Mountain Nymphs love to roam and explore, meeting new spirits and travellers. They are creative and have particularly well-crafted bodies. Both value stealth and are skilled archers. Most Elementals would sacrifice their body to save a Dryad or Nymph.

- **Truth:** Dryads and Nymphs are a more typical Zhou.


Silverleaf Vale
Starpeak Mountains
Moni's Reach River
Twisted Forest
The Prosperous Path
Blazewalk Passage
Searing Soul Range
Scorched Dunes
Starfall Peaks
Savas Wall
Moonshadow Mountains
Bone Gate
Bonecrack Wastes
Blood Stone Desert
Soul Peak
Deep Mountains
Black Brazier
Rival Peaks
Deathshroud Expanse
Mourning Range
Starfall River
Morass Mountains
Wyrmguard
Scar of Ascendence
Scorched Dunes
Crepolis
Firefall Sands
Duskridge River
Beastly Crags
Wraithsand Wastes
Thunderglow Mountain
Starlight Lake
Whispering Summit
Iskis Cave
Magma Peak
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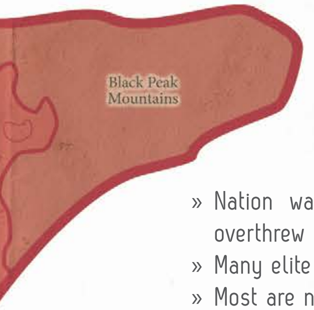
Frostclaw Heights
Ulveridge Mountain
The White Expanse

Drasong Clan

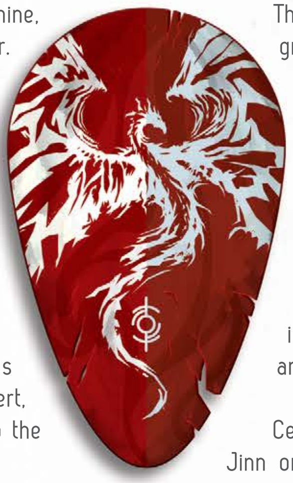
- See Dracim write-up from pg: 12.



- **Ruler:** Choirmasters and elders.
- **Capital:** Black Brazier.
- **Subject Species:** Primarily Twi-Far.
- **Cultural Notes:**
  - Hate all gods and great spirits.
  - Nation was formed before the Druidic War when they overthrew their Jinn masters.
  - Many elite Warriors.
  - Most are nomadic.
  - Most of their population are slaves.
    - Especially Ashen Creet, Dracim, spirits and Jinn.
- **Legal Notes:** Might makes right.
- **Economic Strengths:** Slaves, metalwork.

"They are the monsters of nightmares, falling upon their victims like lightning and feeling nothing for the countless lives they drag into their markets of flesh."

– Rosa Evershine,
Drasong defector.



Since time immemorial, the Blood Stone Desert has been a vast blight upon the continent of Catlan: a perilous abyss of sandstorms, jagged mountain ranges, searing heat, cunning beasts and wandering malicious spirits. Few return from roaming its endless shimmering dunes, all but impossible to navigate without deep knowledge of its meagre safe pathways. Even the Empire of Catla, that ancient and unstoppable juggernaut of conquest and industry, was forced to move its armies around the Blood Stone Desert, fearing devastation if they attempted to cut through to the eastern lands.

Fearsome creatures have adapted to the desert's harsh climes, and some of the very worst monsters can be found roaming the dunes, lurking within caves, or even buried beneath the sands, bursting forth to drag hapless victims to their deaths. Only the Twi-Far are able to thrive in these untameable lands, true children of the desert, and of the scattered clans that still call Blood Stone home, the Drasong Clan reigns supreme. Where once they eked out a nomadic life, grasping for survival, the fall of the ancient Empire of Catla emboldened the Drasong to rise up as a formidable force, establishing the fortress city of **Black Brazier** as their capital. While a number of Twi-Far clans can be found across the Blood Stone Desert, the Drasong Clan is by far the most numerous and powerful, ruling over almost all others by strength alone with a fist of molten steel.

As surely as the suns scorch the earth, so too have the souls of the Drasong been seared to callow husks. The clan is infamous for its slave raids, and are a constant thorn in the side of every surrounding nation, attacking to carry away both plunder and living victims. Though their numbers seem few, empowered by spirits and wielding weapons and armour of the finest steel, few can stand against the sheer prowess of their warriors, and to pursue them back into their desert homeland is a death sentence. The sheer strength of their foothold in the unforgiving desert has allowed them to endure for millennia, and their foul slave trade thrives even as the fortunes of surrounding kingdoms rise.

History Etched in Sand

- See Death of a Wielder & Departure write-up from pg: 66.

Pol, the long-dead god of magic, created the Twi-Far and the desert to be one, a harsh beginning for a people meant to be forged in flame. Seeds of hatred took root when Pol was slain by Neph; bereft of their beloved patron god, the Twi-Far would rise up in open rebellion against all deities who walked the surface of Akharon. They rallied behind **Faren Drasong**, greatest of their warriors and wielder of the stolen club of Jop Jop, but this great crusade to destroy the Eternal gods would have far-reaching consequences.

The gods struck at the Twi-Far as they departed and a great schism formed among the people of the desert. Many sailed across the vast ocean to claim the islands of Fari and Eyna as their new home, while those who celebrated Faren for triumphantly driving the gods from Akharon remained in the Blood Stone Desert; stubbornly clinging to their rebellious spirit and baring the brunt of blame and hatred for their war against the gods. The evil god Dos saw opportunity and took twisted pleasure in transforming many desert Twi-Far into **Jinn**; powerful, malevolent spirits that would enslave and subjugate the Twi-Far centuries.

Centuries of harsh oppression under the rule of the Jinn only fed the Twi-Far's rage, and in a time before the great Druidic War, they rose up and cast off the chains of their oppressors, binding their former masters to common objects: lamps, rings, amulets or other such humiliating trinkets. Free to shape their destinies once more, the desert Twi-Far took the clan name 'Drasong' and a new sigil from their great hero who struck the gods. They abandoned the Jinn's grand stone cities and eventually turned their attention to the surrounding lands that were devastated by the Druidic War; developing a reputation as both ruthless slavers and peerless warriors.

The clan has not gone completely unchallenged by outsiders over the past century. In the aftermath of the Druidic War, the awakened dragon **Languorem** seized the chance to craft the Warped Realm upon the Blood Stone's borders, unleashing an army of Dracim to wipe the Drasong from the face of Akharon; in return, the Drasong have kidnapped countless Dracim slaves from the Warped Kingdom. An uneasy alliance formed between the Drasong Clan and the newly formed Kingdom of Catla: the former trading slaves to the latter for resources. Though now separated by the creation of the Kingdom of Ire, this alliance essentially holds true to the modern era; however, the vast distance between their domains has limited trade to a trickle. Drasong black market agents have thus infiltrated every surrounding kingdom, including Catla and Ire, taking their business from rowdy sunlit bazaars to underhanded candlelit dealings.

People of the Dunes

Life in the Desert is one of sacrifice. Family, friends, possessions, even one's own conscience: to the Drasong, these are luxuries, to be cast away and buried by the shifting sands should they impede one's ambitions. Warrior skill is paramount in Drasong society, as it is the strong who have the right to rule and take as they please. This harkens back to the first rule of life in the clan: one either brings back resources, or become resources themselves. Clansmen are honed through hunting trips, sharpening their skills against fearsome desert beasts and wild spirits until the weak are culled and their betters ascend. This respect for individual strength has its foundations in the veneration of their hero Faren, who made the gods bleed and drove them from Akharon. It is said that his spirit will one day return when a Twi-Far warrior grows powerful enough to receive him.

Trade of Flesh & Steel

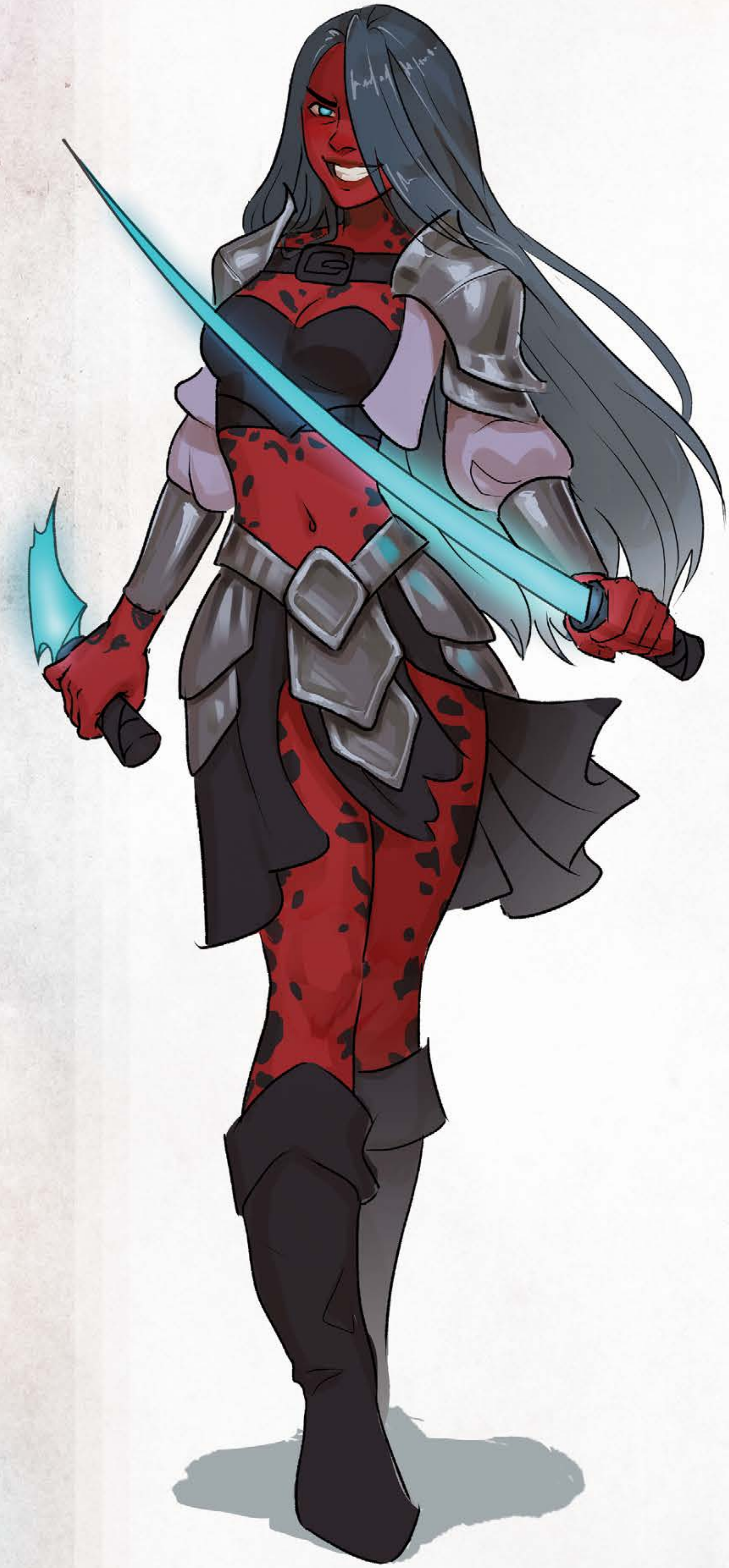
Although their prowess as warriors is far-known, few consider the economic savvy of these desert folk, which proves them to be far more than bloodthirsty savages. Horrific as it may be, the Drasong slave trade is a fearsome machine of industry, well-oiled and tuned to perfection. A full three-quarters of the desert population is made of slaves, forced to labour in everything from working the smithing bellows to combat sports against captured desert beasts – or any task the Drasong feel is beneath them (a hefty list).

Slaves are not the desert's only industry: the Drasong fetch a high price for their peerless metalwork, objects containing sealed spirits, or the wisdom of their dark seers, all precious resources flowing from Blood Stone. Many have bravely ventured into the dunes, seeking to trade for items of power, captured loved ones, or a sliver of the fabled songsteel, and this gumption has been rewarded with a pleasant drink and a hearty laugh over trade dealings. Where armies have perished at the Drasong's hands, lone sojourners have been allowed fair negotiation and often great success, respected by the desert folk for their simple courage and determination.

Creet and Dracim are the most common victims of the Clan, and few have suffered as much as the Ashen Creet. Once their secret underground nation south of the Thunderglow Mountains was discovered by the Drasong, the Ashen Creet were slaughtered in the tens of thousands and enslaved en mass; meanwhile, few will advocate for the Dracim, and many breathe a sigh of relief that it is the spawns of the evil Dragon King, and not other species, that are the Drasong's most common victims.

Songsteel

Many ancient ruins lie buried in the Blood Stone Desert, and these have become bustling mining sites for the Drasong's



Twi-Far drasong slaver.

greatest discovery: songsteel. So named for its melodic, almost hypnotic ringing when struck, songsteel is the purest of minerals, hardy and versatile, and found only in Blood Stone. Even before this discovery, the Drasong were natural masters of fire, often using only the blazing energy pouring from their fingertips to shape metal to their will. The discovery of songsteel seemed almost like a blessing from the desert itself, and with mining operations booming, songsteel creations swiftly became a lucrative Drasong export, fetching jaw-dropping prices in markets across the continent.

» **Truth:** Ancient human ruins lie beneath the desert, and it is from these sites that the Drasong relentlessly mine songsteel. Priceless artefacts and history-defining technological wonders have been destroyed in the Drasong's race to harvest rare minerals, and still they press on, lusting after more power and profits.

Bonding with a Spirit

» See Peridil write-up from pg: 202.

By sheer necessity, the Twi-Far of the Blood Stone Desert have a tempestuous relationship with spirits, quite unlike their kin across other parts of Akharon. They not only reject wild spirits sent to them by the phoenix **Peridil**, but slaying these ethereal would-be partners is seen as a rite of passage into adulthood. The Drasong prefer to seek out and merge with the wild and powerful spirits of the desert, often entities of fire, death or darkness. Young initiates are sent out into the desert alone, seeking a spirit worthy of subjugation, and then forcing that spirit to bend to their will through ancient rites and rituals; a tradition known as an **Elegy**. To those that succeed, power is theirs by right of conquest. To those that fail, souls are obliterated as the spirit claims their body as its own. These unfortunate failures are hunted down and shackled by their Drasong kin, etched with warding runes and used as attack dogs until their body perishes.

Home Beneath the Suns

Many Drasong live lives of nomads, travelling between well-mapped caves and oases where they may find water for their long journeys. Travelling parties – known simply as **Choirs** – are savage and tight-knit, with leadership shifting like the sands as ever-stronger challengers vie for power. Raiding parties constantly scour the desert for monsters to kill for food, divine ruins to harvest for songsteel and escaped slaves to drag back in chains. Choirs are always accompanied by large teams of slaves, tamed desert beasts of burden and occasionally a bound Jinn. Choirs are prideful of their ability to traverse the desert, and care little for the names or faces of their disposable slaves; this complacency can often leave them vulnerable to infiltration or ambush – if they can be reached.

The Drasong have no love for notions of kings and queens, emperors and overlords. Even in their capital city of Black Brazier, no ruler sits higher above the others and their wicked **Black Throne** sits empty as it awaits the spiritual return of Faren Drasong. Decisions on everything from commerce to war are made by a complex and deeply ingrained system of respect for the city's **choirmasters** and **elders**, baffling from the perspective of an outsider. There is no round table, no scribe noting minutes, and no solid hierarchy; only impromptu battle councils between desert factions, with voices raised and blows struck until a way forward has revealed itself. Perhaps the blazing strength of so many mighty spirits gathered in one place has birthed a profound connection that does away with the need for crowns – or, as the Drasong believe, maybe a rowdy public brawl between battle-hardened elders truly is a better way to guide a nation forward.

The forays of Choirs through the Blood Stone Desert leave plenty of time for songs, tales and even works of art. Sand etching is a common practice for roaming Choirs: stunning pieces of art drawn into the desert sands, with the full understanding that they may last for mere hours before the winds sweep them away. This is in harmony with Drasong philosophy: all things are ephemeral, and in this cruel life, one must seize beauty in the moment before moving swiftly on.

This principle is on full display in Black Brazier, the Drasong capital, which stands as a testament to sheer practicality: etched into a massive jagged outcropping, ringed by fortified walls of black steel, and yet inside can be found a sea of tents that shift and change as the city's inhabitants come and go. The only buildings are those that serve a practical purpose, chief among them being the **Dirge**. An enormous metal factory looming over Black Brazier, the Dirge is the heart of Drasong industry, spewing forth black smoke that has long since come to rest on the surrounding plains. Known as Faren's Lament, this miasma of choking smog offers an extra layer of protection for the city, a guiding pillar of black for lost nomads, and a dire warning for beasts and outsiders, even from a great distance. Day and night, songsteel is fed into the Dirge, and finished creations are shipped out.

Deep within the heart of the Dirge, in a hollowed-out chamber within the bedrock, lies an open Drasong secret. Long ago, during the Age of Darkness, the enormous **Dragon King Vorathor** was discovered by Drasong miners slumbering beneath the earth. Seizing this great opportunity, they bound the great beast in songsteel chains and dragged him to Black Brazier, where he awoke during the Druidic War he found himself imprisoned beneath the city in a world much changed. The once proud Dragon King is now a slave, watched day and night by bound Jinn, forced to light the forges of the Dirge from now until eternity. And yet, for all their might, the Drasong have underestimated Vorathor's cunning, honed over millennia. Already, Vorathor whispers to the Jinn who serve as his guards, slowly picking apart their arcane bonds and rebinding them to himself, biding his time until he may burst forth in a glorious inferno to take his revenge on the Drasong.

» **Truth:** The Drasong Clan evolved out of the Dragon Symphony after they started to ally with powerful Efreeti Symphonies to fight back against the many growing threats on Akharon. Many Twi-Far – especially the Phoenix and Salamander Symphonies – objected to this union and abandoned their kin in the Blood Stone Desert.

Example Minor Clans

"We struck the gods and drove them from the world.

We struck the Jinn and their great cities now lie empty to be reclaimed by the dunes.

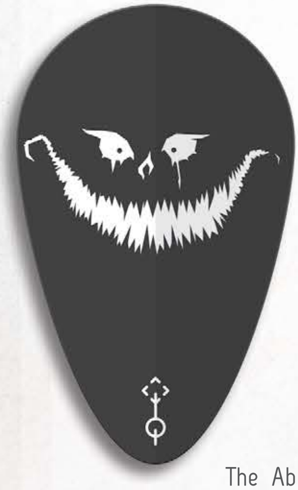
We shall strike the Warped Dragon, and reclaim the body of our dearest Pol from beneath his muck and mire.

When we are reunited with our wayward metal kin – the Children of Pol – we shall strike Akharon itself. Our rage will be a tempest, fierce and unrelenting, tearing tyrants from gilded thrones and bleeding plump cities dry. Only then shall Faren return, not as a man but as a god. Our new Pol."

– Kali Darkridge,
Abyssal Chorus Choirmaster.

Few would look upon the unending sands of the Blood Stone Desert and think it teeming with diversity; and yet, the dunes hide a many-layered system of warring factions. While the strength and numbers of the Drasong clan remain unmatched, other Twi-Far clans and factions vie eternally for scraps of power, each with their own part to play in Blood Stone's vicious and fluid ecosystem.

All desert Twi-Far consider themselves to be both Drasong and any other smaller clan that they are a part of.

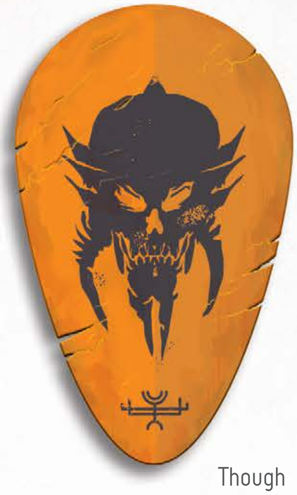


Abyssal Chorus

- Subject Species:
  - Primarily Twi-Far.
- Cultural Notes:
  - Constantly war against the Warped Kingdom.
    - Use many spirits and Jinn to fight.
  - Skilled at large-scale conflicts
  - Strong spirit summoners.
- Economic Strengths:
  - Dracim slaves, mercinaries.

The Abyssal Chorus are a powerful clan who are constantly attacking, raiding and defending against the Dracim armies of the Warped Kingdom. They have grown wealthy off their slave trade, and use these funds to equip their warriors, recruit mercenaries and purchase enslaved Jinn.

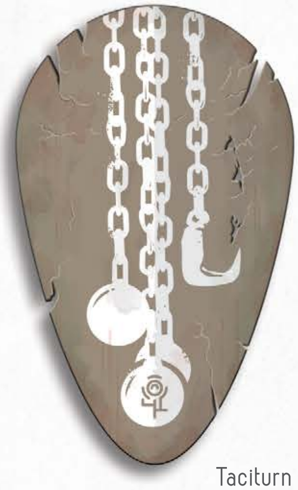
All of the desert's greatest warriors have spent time alongside the Chorus against the draconic armies. Unlike other clans, the Abyssal Chorus are skilled at large-scale tactics, siegecraft, defence and war logistics. The greatest of their warriors can summon hundreds of dark spirits to fight as disposable troops, carefully using them to drain the strength of their enemies before they engage in person to finish the job. Angry Jinn are also used in their war, though never sacrificed as they are a rare resource.



Bone Bards

- Subject Species:
  - Primarily Twi-Far.
- Cultural Notes:
  - Secretive.
  - Strong connection to demons and ghostly spirits.
  - Many dark enchanters.
- Legal Notes:
  - Not under Drasong rule.
- Economic Strengths:
  - Spiritual guidance.

Though this enigmatic clan are limited in number, they still wield a fearsome amount of influence, renowned and feared for the immense insight of their dark enchanters. A true Drasong council of war is considered incomplete without a member of the Bone Bards present, using their arcane-fuelled sights to scry faraway lands and wrest answers from the trapped spirits of slain enemies. Even their bodies are submerged in the arcane since birth, and members of the clan are distinctive for their gleaming orange eyes and demonic tattoos. Vanishing into mist when struck, the Bone Bards have developed a reputation as unkillable ghouls, although their ill-gotten wisdom is famously coveted even beyond the borders of the desert.

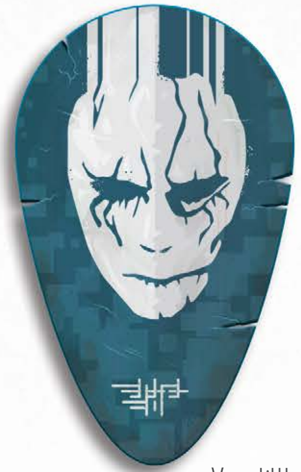


Iron Harmony

- Subject Species:
  - Primarily Twi-Far.
- Cultural Notes:
  - Live within Black Brazier, and are not nomadic.
  - Skilled blacksmiths.
- Legal Notes:
  - Enforce order and watch over the Vorathor within Black Brazier.
- Economic Strengths: Metalwork.

Taciturn and detached, the Iron Harmony is one of the few clans that has made Black Brazier their permanent home. Instead of nomadic forays, members of Iron Harmony have become metalworkers without peer, tirelessly working the forges of the Dirge to produce peerless creations that are traded across continents. To them also falls the duty of watching over Vorathor, the dragon enslaved beneath the city whose breath lights the great furnaces.

Justice in the city of Black Brazier is left in the hands of Iron Harmony. A terrible fate for those who cross the Clans as they are sentenced to forge labour, joining the slaves that work bellows and cart cumbersome materials, toiling under their forgemasters until death. It is said that the Dirge's eternal heat has seared the souls of the Harmony, rendering them as unfeeling as the metals they work.

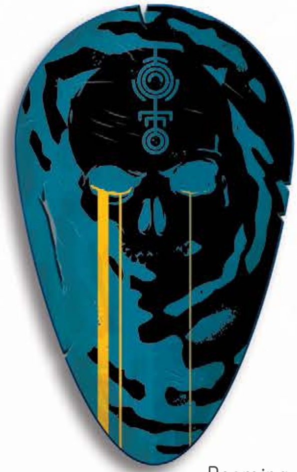


Siren

- **Subject Species:**
  - Primarily Twi-Far.
- **Cultural Notes:**
  - Cruel and violent people.
  - Feared and not trusted by other Twi-Far clans.
  - Love bright colours and sing many strange songs.
- **Economic Strengths:**
  - Food, plunder from the Prosperous Path.

Very little exists in the desert that would unnerve a savage, battle-hardened Twi-Far warrior. Those of the Siren clan are an unsettling exception. Even in a place where bloodthirst is a vital survival trait, Siren is known for its sheer cruelty and lust for violence, and its clansmen are commonly thought to be utterly insane. Painting their caravans in gaudy colours, their faces with ghoulish symbols and their raucous and bawdy songs can be heard for miles in every direction, sweeping across the dunes in a chaotic melody.

Unlike most clans, Siren are just as likely to torture their potential slaves to death than they are to put them to work, and those who survive to be sold are left dead in spirit from the horrors of the journey.



Volcanverse

- **Subject Species:**
  - Primarily Twi-Far.
- **Cultural Notes:**
  - Strong focus on trade, especially with Frost Trolls.
  - Wealthy.
  - Comfortable living outside the Blood Stone Desert.
  - Many Ashen Creet slaves.
- **Economic Strengths:**
  - Slaves, arctic artefacts.

Roaming the southern reaches beyond the edges of the Blood Stone Desert and the lands of the Ashen Creet, the Volcanverse clan are at times both blessing and curse to the Drasong. As familiar with the lush bordering mountains as they are with desert dunes, they are the only faction with strong ties to the Frost Trolls, whom they provide with songsteel in exchange for powerful arctic magics. These artefacts of ice and snow are essential to the songsteel cooling process; and thus, the Twi-Far of Volcanverse form a vital part of Blood Stone's economy. Knowing this they have begun to demand ever higher prices for their services, garnering a poor reputation as miserly 'cold dwellers' and not true denizens of the desert. Volcanverse are distinctive by their fine furs, a practical garb when venturing into freezing Troll territory, but flaunted even in warmer northern climes as a symbol of their wealth.

Ashen Creet

- See Creet write-up from pg: 8.

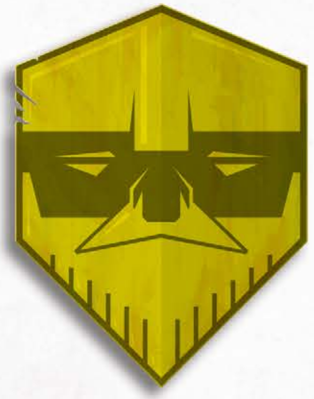
- **Ruler:** King Hakon, son of Ingvar, son of Knut, son of ... (Creet).
- **Capital:** Ikis Cave.
- **Subject Species:** Primarily Creet.
- **Cultural Notes:**
  - Distrust gods, great spirits and magic.
  - Secretive, with many hidden settlements.
    - Especially from gods and Drasong Clans.
  - Live both above and below ground.
- **Legal Notes:**
  - Worship of gods performing magic within most settlements is forbidden.
- **Economic Strengths:** Mining, trained animals.

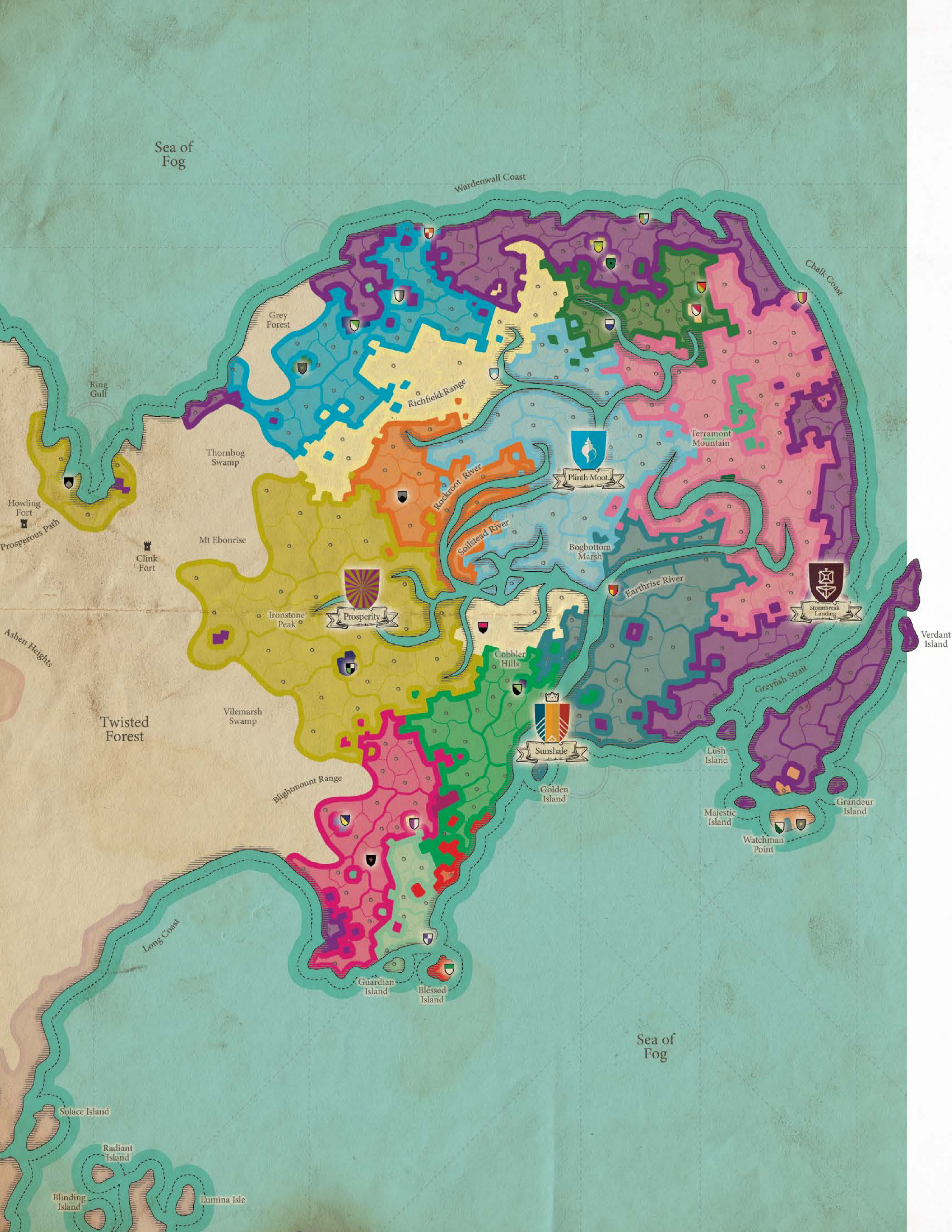
For a thousand years the Ashen Creet have lived quite lives of solitude around and under the volcanic mountains that were created by their firstborn ancestors. Hiding from the gods and nations under sulfurous clouds, they farmed ash-enriched soil, dug for precious ores and lived peaceful and contemplative lives. They were not prepared for the sudden arrival of the Drasong Clan from the Blood Stone Desert. They were struck with such devastating power that a quarter of their population was slaughtered within a year and a quarter more were dragged away into slavery.

Those that survived would not abandon their homeland as they held many hidden Sacred Dens (pg: 11) that they could never allow to be plundered, lest their divine treasures fall into the hands of the evil god Dos. Most Ashen Creet townships – both above and below the surface world – are abandoned or held by small groups of hardy Creet with trained war pets.

The Ashen Creet have become capable warriors and have transformed their homeland into a fortress of tunnels, traps, towers and patrols. Though it is not the bloodthirsty Drasong Clan that they fear most, it is the return of Dos who has taken an interest in his lost children. Demons and cults of the dark god have already begun to appear, probing both their physical and spiritual defences.

In recent years, descendants of those who were enslaved have begun to return to their ancestral homes from the Kingdom of Ire. Granting the Ashen Creet a small sliver of hope and a reminder that they are not alone in this world.




Sea of Fog
Wardenwall Coast
Chalk Coast
Grey Forest
Ring Gulf
Richfield Range
Thornbog Swamp
Howling Fort
Prosperous Path
Clink Fort
Mt Ebonrise
Rockroot River
Soilstead River
Plinth Moot
Terramont Mountain
Bogbottom Marsh
Earthrise River
Stormbreak Landing
Verdant Island
Prosperity
Ironstone Peak
Ashen Heights
Cobbler Hills
Twisted Forest
Vilemarsh Swamp
Sunshale
Greyfish Strait
Lush Island
Golden Island
Blightmount Range
Majestic Island
Grandeur Island
Watchman Point
Long Coast
Guardian Island
Blessed Island
Sea of Fog
Solace Island
Radiant Island
Blinding Island
Lumina Isle

Tarquinius Republic

- **Ruler:** Council of Tarqûns.
- **Capital:** Sunshale.
- **Subject Species:** Primarily Remnant.
- **Cultural Notes:**
  - Strong guilds and tradition of trade.
  - Traditional Ta'Di is growing in popularity.
  - Favour colourful clothing.
  - Veneration of land and travel.
- **Legal Notes:**
  - Ruled by a class of knight-like rulers known as Tarqûns.
  - Land ownership is earned and maintained through civic service.
    - Land grants voting power.
- **Economic Strengths:** Animal products, armour, rice, spices, sugar, perfumes.

"Even as you vanish into the horizon, may the blessed soil always cling to your boots."

– Tarquinius proverb.

To its neighbours, the Tarquinius Republic is known by many names: the Kingless Land, or the Ending of the Path. To the Panos Theocracy, Tarquinius is a godless bastion of heathens. To the Kraken Isle Pirates and the Drasong Clan, it's a delectable raid target. Such is the fate of a country that shares borders with so many others, and yet seems to fly in the face of thousands of years of tradition.

For their part, the colourful people of Tarquinius care far less for their reputation as an eccentricity, and far more for the health of their trade. Its people are industrious, its guilds robust, and its influence far greater than its short history would imply. Such is the Tarquinius Republic: a nation steadily forging a new path through sheer strength of industry.

A Bloody History

Remnant kings and queens came and went in Tarquinius' distant past, all of them firmly under the thumb of the ancient Empire of Catla, but the old ways of rulership were ground to dust by the Druidic War. Magical warfare reduced Tarquinian cities to rubble, their armies were overrun by great Neph Spawn monsters, and druidic magic caused vast forest-covered mountains to erupt from the earth. The survivors were pushed up against the coast of the Sea of Fog, desperately clinging to life until the Archdruid abandoned his great quest and his armies scattered.

Survivors fought amongst themselves over what remained, and ill-fated city-states rose and fell with frightening swiftness throughout the following century. Tarquinius itself had been drastically changed: where once there had been gentle grassy slopes and crystal blue lakes, mountains and swamps now littered the landscape, linked by vast stretches of rolling plains. With their economy in shambles, the burgeoning system of authority had only one great boon to grant its citizens: land.

Greedy town mayors and city lords placated citizens with lavish gifts of territory that were actually a double-edged sword. Freshly crafted marshlands and wild monster-filled forests were handed as rewards for great acts of service, with the full expectation that these would be worthless for farming and thus more of a burden than a prize. The rulers of the old kingdom would severely underestimate those who had survived the Druidic War: forged by flame and burning with determination, these distinguished individuals – the first of the **Tarqûn** – would bring these untamed territories to heel, uncovering their hidden resources and becoming more powerful than the corrupt lords who'd so readily foisted the land upon them.

These rulers made a fatal mistake, for the druids of old had not cursed the land with death, but with the seeds of life. Once the monsters were slain and farms established, the soil brought forth a bounty that would pay great dividends to the Tarqûn, the nouveau class of nobility: these 'Holders of Soil'. The **Council of Tarqûns** united and established the Tarquinius Republic, finally sweeping away the old-world nobles to make way for a country ruled by those who worked and defended its soil with their own hands. This respect for land would become embedded in the consciousness of the new Republic, coalescing into two major principles: The Will of the Soil, and the Horizon's Eye.

Will of the Soil

Power in the Tarquinius Republic is dictated by a person's wealth of land, known by tradition as 'The Will of the Soil': quite literally, the earth in one's possession grants greater voting power. Land may never be purchased or inherited, but must be earned through civic service. Once an individual has attained a certain quantity of land, and has proven its worth to the Republic's economy, they are considered for the position of Tarqûn. Tarqûn attend councils to decide important matters, bringing the concerns of the people living on their land to public debate.

The Will of the Soil, though simple in principle, is a complex series of political interplays that can cause rapid power shifts based on the bounty of one's harvest, or the strength of foreign trading partnerships. One would think that becoming a Tarqûn is impossible, as none would willingly erode their own power by giving away land. However, the Council of Tarqûns keep a watchful eye over their own, prizing actions that benefit the whole rather than selfish hoarding, and it is the expected role of a Tarqûn to reward merit with gifts of territory. This extends to inheritance: upon their passing, Tarqûn may only bequeath a small sliver of land to their descendants, while the rest of their territory becomes the collective property of the Council, to be given to those deemed worthy.

Horizon's Eye

Tarqûn are by nature people of business, resulting in a nation with trade buried deep within its culture. The Horizon's Eye is a principle developed from tireless efforts to establish trade routes, first to surrounding nations, and as industries flourished, even further afield.

In essentials, the principle dictates that Tarquinians are not merely travelling merchants, but firmly embedded in economies wherever they roam, extending the strength of Tarquinius' guilds far beyond its national borders.

To this end, across almost every major centre of business across the continent can be found a Tarquinian with an uncanny knowledge of its inner workings. They do not run stalls; they have permanent shopfronts. They are not sojourning; they are part of their city's stonework, while remaining fiercely loyal to their Republic. They are not merely knowledgeable; they have worked their way into positions of economic authority. Only the most savvy and trusted Tarqûn agents are sent to uphold the Horizon's Eye, often a lifelong task, and one of great sacrifice as they will tend to the sacred soil in the home nation.

Horizon Disks

Another aspect of the Horizon's Eye is the veneration of travel, seen as vital in maintaining healthy business ties and ensuring that trade routes are safe and true. Tarqûn agents were the first to thoroughly map the Prosperous Path, viewing it as vital in ensuring their bountiful future by connecting their nation to the Kingdom of Ire, but this was only the first step. To those merchants that feel the call of the great beyond, they are left to forge their own 'Prosperous Path': seeking out new opportunities to traverse foreign nations and establish strong trade links across the vast continent.

While land is granted for acts of service within Tarquinius, intrepid travellers who prove their worth are gifted with small or large Horizon Disks, a symbol of great prestige. Most often worn around the arm or chest, these metallic masterpieces are laced with gold and bonded with protective spells for long journeys. To receive a single large Horizon Disk is a rare honour, signifying that the recipient has travelled far and wide to establish a fruitful trade relationship. To bear more than one disk is rare still, and only two Tarquinians in recorded history have earned a third Horizon Disk. The first: **Vimbai Mweya**, who dauntlessly sailed across the vast ocean, braving storms and pirates to forge diplomatic ties with distant Twi-Far of Fari and Eyna, a staggering achievement. The second: **Takudzwa Gomo**, who is forever immortalised in both the Tarquinius Republic and the Kingdom of Ire for sharing knowledge of guilds. His efforts revolutionised Ire's system of trade following their civil war, and is the reason the two nations remain firm allies to this day. These two are seen as perfect embodiments of the Horizon's Eye, showing the immense power and value of forging friendships across borders – friendships that, over time, have their foundation in more than simple coin.

Gods & Gossip

To the surrounding nations, the Tarquinius Republic is a curiosity at best and a dangerous spark of subversion at worst, presenting a system that does away with singular rulers or the will of the gods. They are especially despised by the Panos Theocracy, where the priests viciously decry the Will of the Soil as spitting in the face of the divine, and regularly prophecy Tarquinius' destruction by everything from raining fire to being swallowed by oceanic storms. Other nations may gossip, but with exports of fine Tarquinian leathers, armour, spices, mead, perfumes and more enlivening their marketplaces, there are few true complaints.

Despite the fuming rage of Panos' leaders, the Tarquinius Republic is not quite the bastion of godless heathens that rumours would suggest, and there is far more on the people's minds than trade and toil. The influence of Fari and Eyna has brought knowledge of spirits and ancestors, a gentler form of traditional Ta'Di worship that harmonises perfectly with the Tarqûn's respect for the land beneath their feet, and has thus swiftly spread across the land.

Traversal & Trade

Jagged. This single word often springs to the minds of those laying eyes on the Republic for the first time. The Druidic War quite literally elevated the landscape, and nation of old now lies eternally buried beneath mountains, vast rivers, swamps and thick forests. The people adapted, and a population of blue **Echru Boars** soon sprang up across the country's farms, bred for durability and swift traversal. One of Tarquinius' most distinctive sights are boar caravans charging across the land, carrying carts of goods or mounted soldiers.

The mercenary military of the Tarquinius Republic may be small, but its soldiers have been honed to a sharp edge by protection duties along the Prosperous Path, the winding trail that connects them to the distant western Kingdom of Ire. Thanks to decades of intense labour and the loss of many lives, the Path of the modern era is well-trodden, expertly mapped, protected by bastions, and escorted by well-paid mercenaries. Despite all of these efforts, their boar caravans are still regularly attacked by monsters within the Twisted Forest and Drasong raiders from the Blood Stone Desert. Guilds are all too happy to use their resources and pitch in for extra protection, ensuring that their goods arrive on time, unspoiled and ready to fetch a high price at far-flung markets.

Tarquinian Guilds

The quality of Tarquinian exports is utterly vital to the nation's survival, resulting in the Council of Tarqûns establishing a strict system of guilds. These are not simply clubs for the privileged, but immense organisations that each hold unyielding power over every type of industry, from mining raw ore to weaving fine silk. No business is permitted to operate without first registering with a guild and submitting to its authority. Guilds provide formal education in their trade, support for struggling traders, a rigorous system of quality inspections and more, each acting as a bustling hub of their speciality.

Inevitably for organisations that hold the future of the nation in their hands, these guilds wield massive political power behind the scenes, often butting heads with the Tarqûn on matters of state. However, their purpose still shines brightly in the value of Tarquinian exports, and while the particulars of this guild system have been soundly rejected outside the Republic, seeds have been planted across the continent. The guilds of the Kingdom of Ire have steadily begun to wrest power away from the monarchy and Eternal Priesthood, and into the hands of the common workers, a seismic change aided in no small part by silver-tongued local Tarquinius agents who have established themselves in Ire culture.

House Tarquinius

- **Ruler:** Tarqûn Munashe Tarquinius (Remnant).
- **Capital:** Plinth Moot.
- **Subject Species:** Primarily Remnant.
- **Cultural Notes:**
  - Many mountains, swamps, rivers and deep forests.
  - Nation's former royal family.
  - Population tends to dress in darker clothing and values their privacy.
- **Economic Strengths:** Echru Boars, lumber, rice.

"We may be a shadow of our former power, but we have survived where all other lords and ladies of our nation have fallen. Let us not look back with false nostalgia, let us look forward to a better future where we have earned – and not just inherited – our place."

– Tarqûn Munashe Tarquinius.

Much was lost to carnage and flame as the Druidic War tore across Akharon. The family history of House Tarquinius was one royal family among many that was scorched from power – and secretly, the surviving members of the house are immensely grateful. The former rulers of the land were tyrants who wallowed in decadence, devoid of scruples and made impotent by privilege. They found themselves woefully unprepared to muster any kind of defence, and the resulting devastation left their bloodline on the brink of extinction.

Today, outside observers see House Tarquinius as a dusty relic; a throwback to a murky past in which their country had the same antiquated rulership as all others. Today, they act as Tarqûn of the nation's heartlands; an important region, but affording little glory or attention. In secret, however, house descendants are well aware of their sordid past, carefully preserving their true history in whispered vows to avoid repeating their mistakes.

To this end, the leaders of the House have adopted the All-Faith, albeit mostly practised in the shadows. Adherence to the All-Faith is far from outlawed in Tarquinius, but it is a faith held by only a scattered few, mainly immigrants and refugees on the outskirts of society. The revelation that their founding family were practising Druids of Neph – a deadly All-Faith cult – behind closed doors would cast a harsh spotlight on House Tarquinius, attention they can ill afford. Should their family's ancient despotism be discovered, it could spell ruin – and while their rulership has long since faded from the memory of most, a few still remember and are plotting the downfall of House Tarquinius in an act of just retribution.

South Fog Trading Guild

- **Ruler:** Captain 'Ironhook' Jackson (Kaltoran).
- **Capital:** Stormbreak Landing.
- **Subject Species:** Primarily Remnant.
- **Cultural Notes:**
  - Constant conflict with the Kraken Isle Pirates.
  - Incredibly rich and powerful guild
  - Near-monopoly on sea trade from the Republic.
- **Economic Strengths:** Ocean trade (especially from and to their colonies), mercenary navy.

To be part of a Tarquinian guild is far more than a shiny sigil displayed outside one's business. Guilds often wield more power than governments – and none more so than the legendary South Fog Trading Guild. On the surface, their guild are masters of sea trade, heavily relied upon for their fortified fleet, expert sailors and navigation skills that are second-to-none. If something needs to be delivered across the oceans, the sailors of South Fog are the first and only port of call for anyone with sufficient coin. Beneath this veneer? The guild maintains a near monopoly on all oceanic business within the Rupublic, are praised and despised in equal measure across Tarquinius, and have started to establish colonies in distant lands.

For over two decades, the South Fog Trading Guild has been led by Captain 'Ironhook' Jackson, a former unknown who rose from poverty to claim leadership in a lightning-fast coup. Once a rabble of squabbling shipmasters and fishermen, Captain Jackson steered South Fog Guild towards sea trade, becoming a force for change that opened the Tarquinius Republic up to far-flung business partners and drastically improved the country's fortunes.

Jackson would earn the title of 'Ironhook' after his epic victory over a Krakenspawn beast. The tumultuous sea voyage ended with him driving his signature hooked anchor through the monster's head, a feat that gained him notoriety with two completely different audiences. To the Kraken Isle Pirates – forced to give Jackson his epithet after he fulfilled one of their most sacred trials – he is a figure of scorn. It is the fondest wish of many a pirate to be the one who drives a sword through the heart of Ironhook Jackson; and yet, if he were to drop anchor anywhere in their Isles, their creed would make him untouchable. To the people of Tarquinius, the tale of his mythic combat elevated him to a living legend. And yet, a great many seethe with resentment for the ironclad monopoly that South Fog holds on ocean trade, believing their power to ultimately be poison for the future of the Republic.

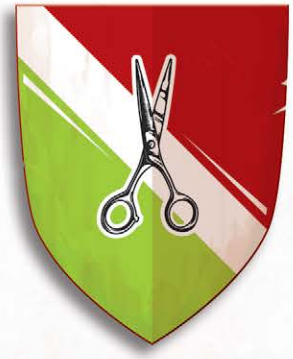
Tailors Guild

- **Cultural Notes:**
  - Ancient organisation with members imbedded within most Republic organisations.
  - Zealous worship of Fik.
- **Economic Strengths:** Espionage.

In days long past, the Tailors Guild was as meek as their name would imply. Seamstresses worked demurely by candlelight, stitchers quietly wove suits for those greater than themselves, and few paid their guild any attention – except when the holes in their breeches needed patching. Change would come gradually, like the steady, smooth motion of a sewing needle. The wars between city-states after the Druidic War forged a new kind of warrior, one with deft hands, a knowledge of subtle magics, and a bearing that the powerful would never regard as a threat. Thus began perhaps the strangest, most unexpected rise to power in the Republic's history: from simple menders to nigh-omnipresent guardians of the realm.

Although few live to remember the change, the horrors of war sharpened the Tailors Guild to a deadly edge. Their spellcasting was honed by countless hours crafting magical armour, and their survival skills by battlefield treks to scavenge crucial materials. Where once its members quietly worshipped Fik, the scissor-wielding goddess of fate, stars and the cosmos, the Druidic War twisted their devotion into true fanaticism. The Tailors Guild would cast off their old ways and come to be relied upon by Tarqûn warriors across the nation for their skills in espionage, assassination and near-perfect ability to guide the hands of fate to specific ends set by the goddess Fik. The name of 'Tailors Guild' endures to the modern era, an open secret for Tarquinian citizens who know their true power.

Members of the Guild are woven into the fabric of the country's most powerful organisations, although the actual identities of their agents are a closely guarded secret known only to a few Tarqûn. While the coastal regions are locked in their constant arms race with pirate raiders and the Tarqûn warriors guard the borderlands with their mercenary armies, the Tailors Guild watches over the interior and the actions of their neighbours. They send out agents to gather intel from belligerent surrounding nations, assassinate key figures stoking foreign aggression, and hunt down enemy spies (especially the **Invigilators** from the Panos Theocracy). In all things, its members are guided by the stars and Fik.



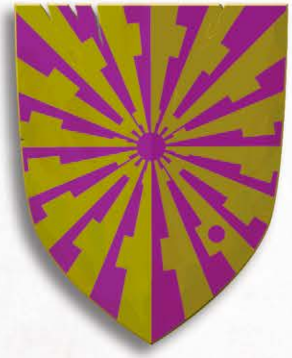
House Zaelan

- **Ruler:** Tarqûn Richler Zaelan the 4th (Remnant).
- **Capital:** Prosperity.
- **Subject Species:** Primarily Remnant.
- **Cultural Notes:**
  - Close with House Badulf from the Kingdom of Ire.
  - Many Echru Boar warriors.
- **Economic Strengths:** Spices, trade (by the Prosperous Path to the Kingdom of Ire), mercenary army.

When enemies lurk on all sides, peace comes at a heavy price. No one knows precisely when House Zaelan became the stewards of the Prosperous Path, but as wealthy landowners and the dominant Tarqûn of the country's western region, their family steadily became heaped with more and more responsibility. Generations passed, seasons came and went, and it became quietly accepted that House Zaelan were the gatekeepers of Tarquinius – and thus was it so. As befitting of this role, the house's martial strength is almost unmatched, honed by decades patrolling the edges of the nation and sending their convoys on long and perilous journeys.

It was the wealthy Tarqûn Richler Zaelan who met with the Early of Badulf from the Kingdom of Ire in days of old, greeting him at the end of his lengthy journey across a forged route through the Twisted Forest that would come to be known as the Prosperous Path. Both possessing keen minds, Richler and Earl instantly recognised the lucrative trade opportunity that lay before them, and the chance to solidify House Zaelan's role in the fledgling Republic. Establishing the Path was a legendary feat in and of itself: House Zaelan and Badulf had to fend off both attacks from, monsters, raiders, bandits and the failing confidence of their people as lives were lost to the perilous trek. And yet, as outposts were established and wealth began to trickle in from the lands beyond, the efforts of both houses were at last vindicated, tenfold and more.

If the South Fog Trading Guild owns the coastline, House Zaelan are the masters of Tarquinius' western reaches. The house's boar riders are divided into several divisions, able to traverse almost any terrain with stunning efficiency. Members of House Zaelan serve in outposts across the Prosperous Path, giving them a wealth of experience combatting Drasong raiders and monsters across every biome, from twisting thorn forests to stinking acid swamps. Zaelan has frequent dalliances with adventurers, paying sellswords and wandering spellcasters handsomely for their services in protecting precious caravans of goods along the long and perilous road.



Panos Theocracy

- **Rulers**: Council of High Priests.
- **Capital**: Woodspire (symbolic), Sancturia (true).
- **Subject Species**: Primarily Kaltoran.
- **Cultural Notes**:
  - Nation was formed after the Druidic War and a brutal Ta'Di religious civil war.
  - Mandatory military service for all citizens.
  - Techno-magic is common.
- **Legal Notes**:
  - Non-Eternal religions are outlawed.
  - Governed by Eternal priests.
  - Isolationist approach to trade and diplomacy.
- **Economic Strengths**: Food, techno-magic.

"We are tempered steel, unbending and ever sharp. We are the blade of the Eternal gods, their will made flesh. Through blood and divine flame, we are purified."

– Duke Solomon Lowiking.

For generations before the Druidic War, the great House of Panos and their vibrant green realm were devoted to the ways of the Reformed Ta'Di and paid lip service to the Eternal priesthood. As they were situated at the far southeastern corner of the ancient Empire of Catla, walled off by the impassable Blood Stone Desert and the vast White Expanse tundra, they enjoyed a degree of autonomy. They survived the Druidic War through the aid of many spirits who were summoned forth by Ta'Di seers and witches.

Following the directions of these powerful arcane leaders, the people of the land cast off all pretences of worship towards the Eternal gods and turned towards traditional Ta'Di practices. House Panos had grown impotent during the war as most of their bloodline were killed, and they could only wring their hands in despair as their realm became a breeding ground for seething resentment between revolutionary Traditional Ta'Di worshipers and their establishment Reformed Ta'Di counterparts. Within a decade the conflict escalated into a bloody civil war that saw seers and witches clashing in the streets in devastating displays of power. Towns burned, fae ran wild, the ghosts of the dead arose and ethereal spirits fled Panos in droves, causing the natural world to twist, wither and perish.

Instigated by members of the Lowiking family, a violent coup would ironically signal the decline of the bloodshed and a turning from the brink of collapse. Gifted Kaltoran prophets claiming to hold memories from the gods themselves arose across the land and preached to every corner the virtues of the Eternal pantheon, making use of powerful techno-magical items and divine knowledge as proof of their message. Through a combination of era-defining rhetoric, infectious passion and the desperation of seeing their land burn, a religious fervour swept across the realm. Battlefields are said to have fallen silent as warriors from both sides fell to their knees, begging for forgiveness from the gods for having strayed from the true path.

In just a few short years, order returned and the Panos Theocracy arose out of the flames of civil war, and that flame continues to this day, borne in the hearts of the people and proclaimed through a fervent love for the Eternal faith. Nowhere on Akharon is the pantheon venerated such as in the Panos Theocracy, not even in the distant Holy Kingdom of Catla; it is enshrined in law, taught from birth, no other faiths are tolerated within their borders, and priests rule over nobles. The Theocracy's monarch is a mere figurehead; a puppet subject to the whims of the Eternal priests, who wield absolute power in all ways besides title. Ubiquitous temples dictate the lives of their adherents, crafting and enforcing the law as they see fit. Techno-magic is acclaimed as an expression of truest worship, resulting in a society where the basics of spellcraft are as common knowledge as the changing of the seasons, children brew potions as a matter of course in classrooms, and even simple farmers wield firearms in defence when they threatened by raiders or monsters.

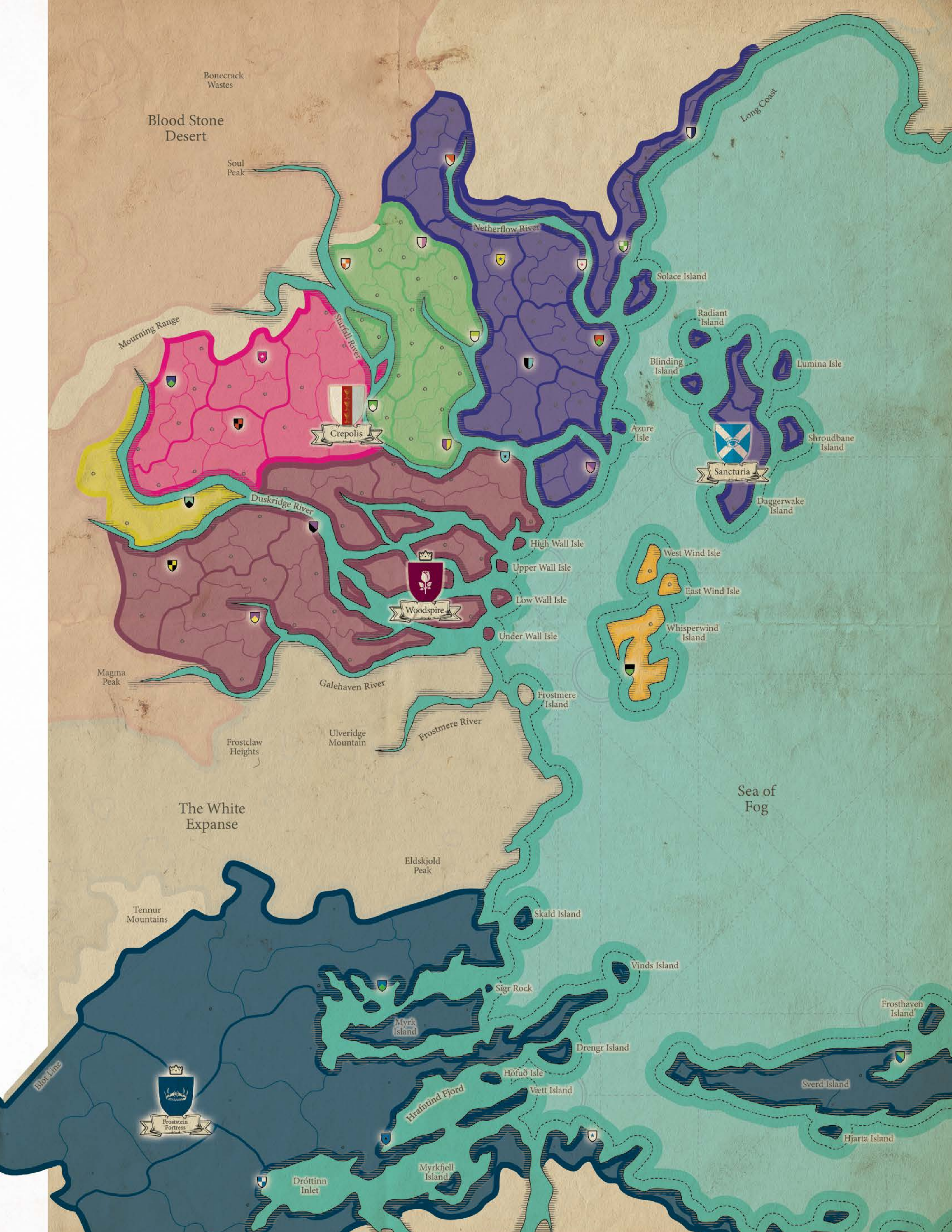
Culture

The borders of the Panos Theocracy are famously ironclad, allowing for only the bare minimum of trade with the nearby Tarquinius Republic and the Kingdom of Romanos. This policy of isolation is taught to the people as a virtue, allowing for greater purity and protection from the horrors of the past. Even the stonewalling of information from surrounding nations is considered by most Panos citizens to be a blessing; a boon of solitude, allowing for greater focus on the Eternal gods. This policy, alongside the day-to-day peace, is kept by the **Invigilators**: an elite force who are equipped with powerful techno-magic and trained to perfection by diabolical regimes. The Invigilators are especially zealous in their rooting out of underground Ta'Di worshippers, who invariably face execution or exile.

Feasts and festivals for the Eternal pantheon are a common occurrence across the Panos Theocracy. Their largest event is the **Night of Cleansing Flame**. Once per year, citizens take to the streets, burning effigies of Ta'Di worshippers on mystically conjured bonfires while hurling insults and engaging in raucous singing. Ceremonial executions are common, with especially odious heretics kept imprisoned specifically for the occasion. This celebration is said to emulate the battle cry of the pantheon as they descended from on high, immolating the ways of the old and calling Panos to repentance.

Threats

The Panos Theocracy is in constant peril from Drasong clan raiders, as well as a simmering conflict with the Southern Legion Tribes. Despite their many enemies, the nation defends its borders with fanatical ferocity. Mandatory military service ensures that the very best are discovered and drafted into the Invigilators, each of whom are said to be the equal of ten soldiers. The heavy permeation of techno-magic ensures quality spellcasters are in ready supply, and most devious of all is the **Invigilator** spy network. To most of Akharon, they are mere whispers; shadows moving in the dark, an ear pressed to the door of any room where secrets are uttered. To the Panos Theocracy, their spy network is the backbone of their defence; a steady stream of information to ensure their tactical superiority.


Bonecrack Wastes
Blood Stone Desert
Soul Peak
Long Coast
Netherflow River
Solace Island
Mourning Range
Starfall River
Radiant Island
Blinding Island
Lumina Isle
Crepolis
Azure Isle
Sanctuaria
Shroudbane Island
Daggerwake Island
Duskridge River
High Wall Isle
West Wind Isle
Upper Wall Isle
East Wind Isle
Woodspire
Low Wall Isle
Whisperwind Island
Under Wall Isle
Magma Peak
Galehaven River
Frostmere Island
Frostmere River
Frostclaw Heights
Ulveridge Mountain
Sea of Fog
The White Expanse
Eldskjold Peak
Tennur Mountains
Skald Island
Vinds Island
Sigr Rock
Frosthaven Island
Myrk Island
Drengr Island
Höfuð Isle
Sverd Island
Blot Line
Vætt Island
Hrafntind Fjord
Froststein Fortress
Hjarta Island
Myrkfjell Island
Dróttinn Inlet

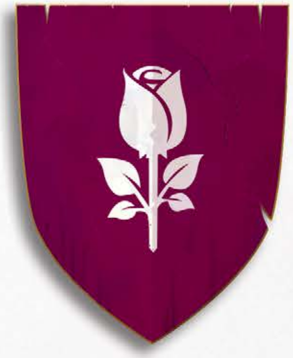
House Panos

- **Ruler:** Queen Miriam Panos (Kaltoran).
- **Capital:** Woodspire.
- **Subject Species:** Primarily Kaltoran and Legion.
- **Legal Notes:**
  - They are puppet rulers of the nation.
  - They are confined to their estates and watched over by priesthood agents and guards.
  - Their realm is directly governed by the Eternal priesthood.
- **Economic Strengths:** Beuocratic governance, wood.

Once the bearers of hopes and dreams; these benevolent Ta'Di rulers were akin to the shining kings and queens that appeared in stories for children. Their realm was verdant and prosperous, and they enjoyed the undying love of their happy subjects. This adoration bred complacency, and the Druidic War collapsed on House Panos like a tidal wave, swiftly reducing their bloodline to shame and ruin as they were revealed to be both weak warriors and poor administrators. Although their realm survived, this golden age would never return, as dissenting elements took root and plunged the region into a civil war. All were saved from Panos' incompetence when their rival House of Lowiking violently wrested control from them and returned order to the fledgling nation as religious revival swept across the land.

House Panos have been reduced to puppets of the priests in an open secret, practically encouraged by the Eternal theocracy as a symbol of mortal authority bending to divine will. The few who remain of House Panos are kept on an even tighter leash, trotted out in their finery to wave on balconies, recite long and heavily rehearsed prayers at temple festivals, and otherwise keep their mouths tightly shut, lest they overstep their role as impotent figureheads. Even their capital city of **Woodspire** has outgrown them, with the monolith of the **Eclipse Temple** – a magnificent, palatial building dedicated to the gods Akh and Ath – casting House Panos' meagre main residence in near-constant shadow. Their lands are under the total control of the Eternal priesthood.

Whispers abound that House Panos still practice Ta'Di worship in secret, drawing upon deep ancestral memories to summon forth spirits to covertly communicate with loyalist factions who chafe under the Eternal priests. House Panos were once great spiritual warriors and rulers, and a time may come when they are called to be so once again.



House Kyria

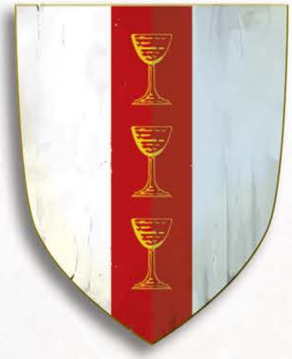
- **Ruler:** Duke Daniel Kyria (Kaltoran).
- **Capital:** Crepolis.
- **Subject Species:** Primarily Kaltoran.
- **Cultural Notes:**
  - Strong worship of Etso.
- **Economic Strengths:** Stone, ore.

The members of this once tiny noble House have long pawed at the realm of the divine, desperately hoarding secrets and chafing across generations at their own mortality. Its members were known for being superstitious, cowardly and chained to ritual, searching far and wide for new sources of arcane power and paying jaw-dropping amounts to obtain secret knowledge from distant lands. Little did they know, this conniving quest would spell the doom of their old way of life.

Their hunger for magical power crossed every moral boundary, even going so far as performing repugnant rituals of an unspeakable nature. In an attempt to diversify their knowledge, House Kyria welcomed the foulest Ta'Di wanderers from the Blood Stone Desert into their city of **Crepolis**; purveyors of profane Twi-Far magics from those who cavorted with evil spirits. Crepolis became a haven for such ilk, and their knowledge would eventually spill out into the rest of the region. In a twist of events these gifted Seers and Witches that they helped to educate would both save the realm during the Drudic War and also spark off a brutal arcane civil conflict in the following years. To hide their role in the nation's destructive history, House Kyria was forced to capitulate to House Lowiking, pledging themselves to the new regime.

Over the centuries they have grown from minor nobility into a great House that lays claim to the nation's mountainous and fertile central lands. The bloodline now exists permanently on the edge of a knife: they are repentant of their old ways and desperately seek to follow the will of the Eternal gods (especially of their patron Etso, the god of festivals and madness), but their ancestral memories constantly pull them back into a cloying darkness.

To those who succumb to temptation, all of this complex history is a mere stepping stone towards their grand scheme. Whether from the Eternal gods, Ta'Di spirits, the All-Faith or another source entirely, their aspirations of ultimate power and immortality still burn bright… if only in absolute secrecy.



House Lowiking

- **Ruler:** Duke Solomon Lowiking (Kaltoran).
- **Capital:** Sancturia.
- **Subject Species:** Primarily Kaltoran.
- **Cultural Notes:**
  - Skilled at meditation and accessing ancestral memories.
- **Legal Notes:**
  - True rulers of the Panos Theocracy.
- **Economic Strengths:** Food, techno-magic.

By all appearances, the Panos Theocracy is under the firm rule of the Eternal gods, with mortals – even those in positions of authority – acting as humble, contrite servants. The truth of power, as always, is something far less divine. Anyone searching for the guiding hand behind the Panos Theocracy will find their answer in the form of House Lowiking. In the golden era, House Lowiking proved themselves to be economic powerhouses and the shrewdest of merchants, supporting the realm via their fleet of trading vessels from their water-bound capital city of **Sancturia**. While the ruling House Panos grew weak, House Lowiking trained their sons and daughters in meditation: pushing past the mental dangers of the Age of Darkness (losing many to madness along the way) to glimpse sparks of Eternal divinity and knowledge through their ancestral memories. They became masters of techno-magic and it was only natural that Lowiking seized its chance at the height of the region's civil war, sweeping in to save the nation from Panos' incompetence.

Many from the House dominate the upper echelons of the Eternal priesthood, are the founders and chief benefactors of the **Invigilators**, and continue to act as the backbone of the country's economy via their control over techno-magic. House Lowiking are the veins spreading from the beating heart of the Panos Theocracy, as deeply embedded as threads in a tapestry. From their estates at the heart of Sancturia they pull the strings of an entire nation, utterly assured that their path is divinely blessed and that their destiny is as agents of the Eternal gods.

Lowiking has long encouraged an isolationist approach to both trade and travel since the civil war. They are cautious about preserving their technological advantages and fear cultural corruption. Times are slowly changing as they have learned of the gods blessing other nations with comparable techno-magical knowledge and their own close encounters with the divine. Small groups of diplomats, merchants, scholars and explorers have recently been permitted to visit other nations and wild lands to gather knowledge.

Kingdom of Romanos

- **Ruler:** King Magnar "Jötnar Crusher" Romanos (Legion).
- **Capital:** Froststein Fortress.
- **Subject Species:** Primarily Legion.
- **Cultural Notes:**
  - Nation was formed when they separated from the Southern Legion Tribes to join the ancient Empire of Catla.
  - Many season-based rituals.
  - Skilled sailors and fishermen.
  - Sparse population.
  - Trade partners with the Tarquinius Republic.
- **Economic Strengths:** Fish, sailors.

Long before the Druidic War, the remote and sparsely populated Kingdom of Romanos was part of the Southern Legion Tribes. Their ruler – Jarl Rom Romanos – wished to secure his family's legacy and for authority to pass to his offspring. For centuries their Jarls had been selected by druids and through ritualistic combat. This resulted in powerful leaders, but caused much instability and kept them in a state of constant war. Rom Romanos broke this pattern by swearing fealty to the ancient Empire of Catla, adopting their Eternal gods, many of their political structures and – most importantly – their hereditary succession laws.

The arctic realm of Romanos is a harsh land that is supported by hunting, fishing and trade with the Tarquinius Republic. They are hardy people who are in regular conflict with Souther Tribe Raiders, Frost Trolls and the occasional Jötnar Giant.

Romans are skilled sailors and fishermen. Their ships are typically long and narrow, with a shallow draft that allows for navigation through both open seas and shallow rivers. They are crafted with overlapping wooden planks, covered in runic marking and have a distinct curved prow along with a single mast and square sail.

The changing seasons are extremely important to them, as summer and winter can bring both danger and prosperity, and each has many associated rituals. Their most sacred ceremony is the **Blot**, meaning 'blood sacrifice'. Animals are killed around a great fire, and their blood is collected and worn. These sacrifices are performed by **Bloodreaver** priests/priestesses in the name of Ath, their most venerated goddess. In ages past these sacrifices were to the goddess' Corp and Neph, and included people who had volunteered or been taken as prisoners of war. There are rumours that during particularly harsh winters these barbaric practices are still performed in secret.

Shadowmoor Isle

Kraken Isle Pirates

- **Ruler**: Salt Queen Natoya "Black Moon" Mvura (Remnant).
- **Capital**: Brinebreaker Fortress.
- **Subject Species**: Primarily Remnant.
- **Cultural Notes**:
  - Call themselves Salt Folk.
  - Exceptional sailors.
  - Value freedom, wealth and skill.
  - Regularly raid Tarquinius Republic ships and coasts.
  - Strong worship of Corp.
- **Legal Notes**:
  - Ruled by nine factions known as 'Coalition'.
    - Captains and bartenders hold much sway.
  - Laws tend to be unwritten, and based on traditions known as Codes.
    - Earning a Captain's Title is the most sacred of these traditions.
- **Economic Strengths**: Fishing, lumber, piracy.

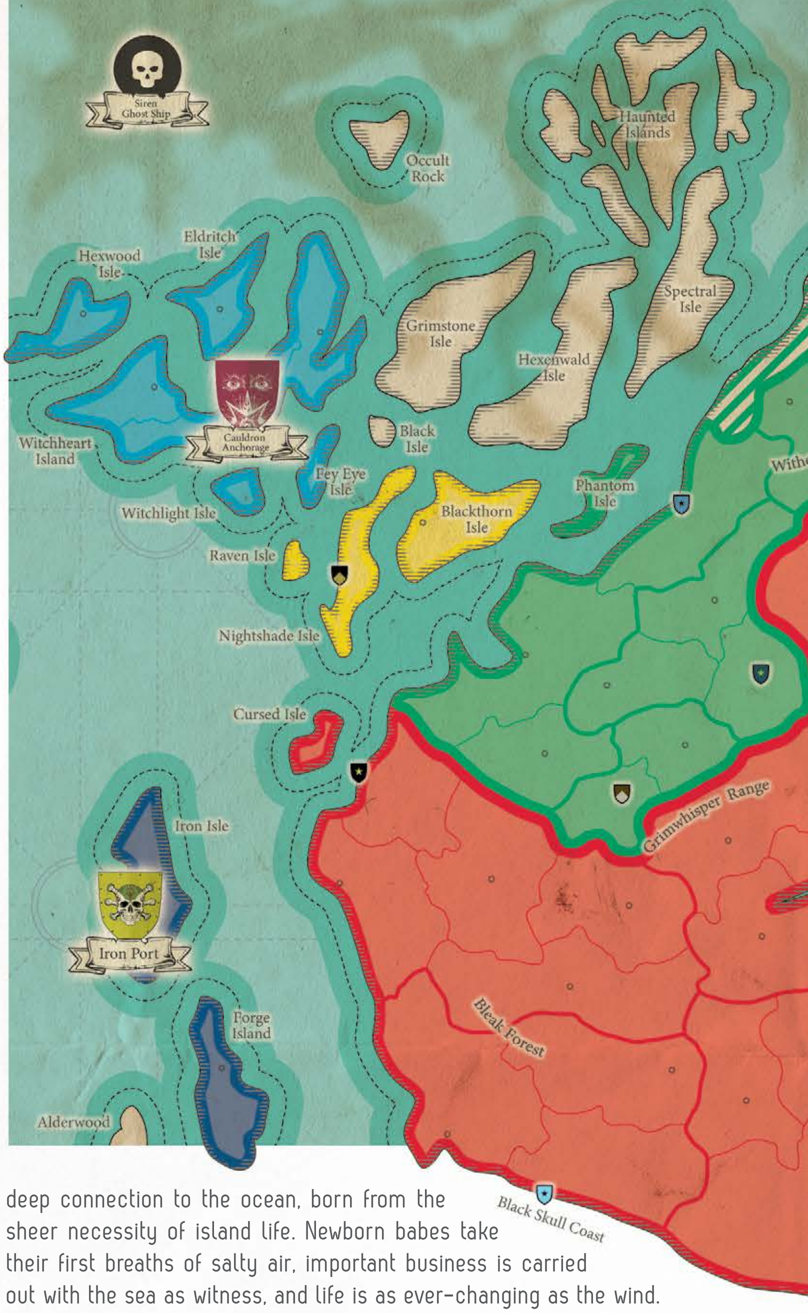
"Plunder's the only love worth having – gold don't betray and jewels never break hearts!"

– Traditional Salt Folk saying.

The tumultuous seas of the Kraken Isles are no place for landlubbers. Whirlpools lay scattered across the waters, horrific beasts lurk beneath the waves, and there lies the constant danger of ruinous storms. But to the Salt Folk, intrepid seafarers without peer, the oceans represent the simplest and truest freedom, far from the chains forged by emperors and priests. Lawless, violent and rife with monstrous threats; these are the qualities that have honed the Salt Folk into the hardest workers, drinkers and pirates to be found across the seas of Akharon.

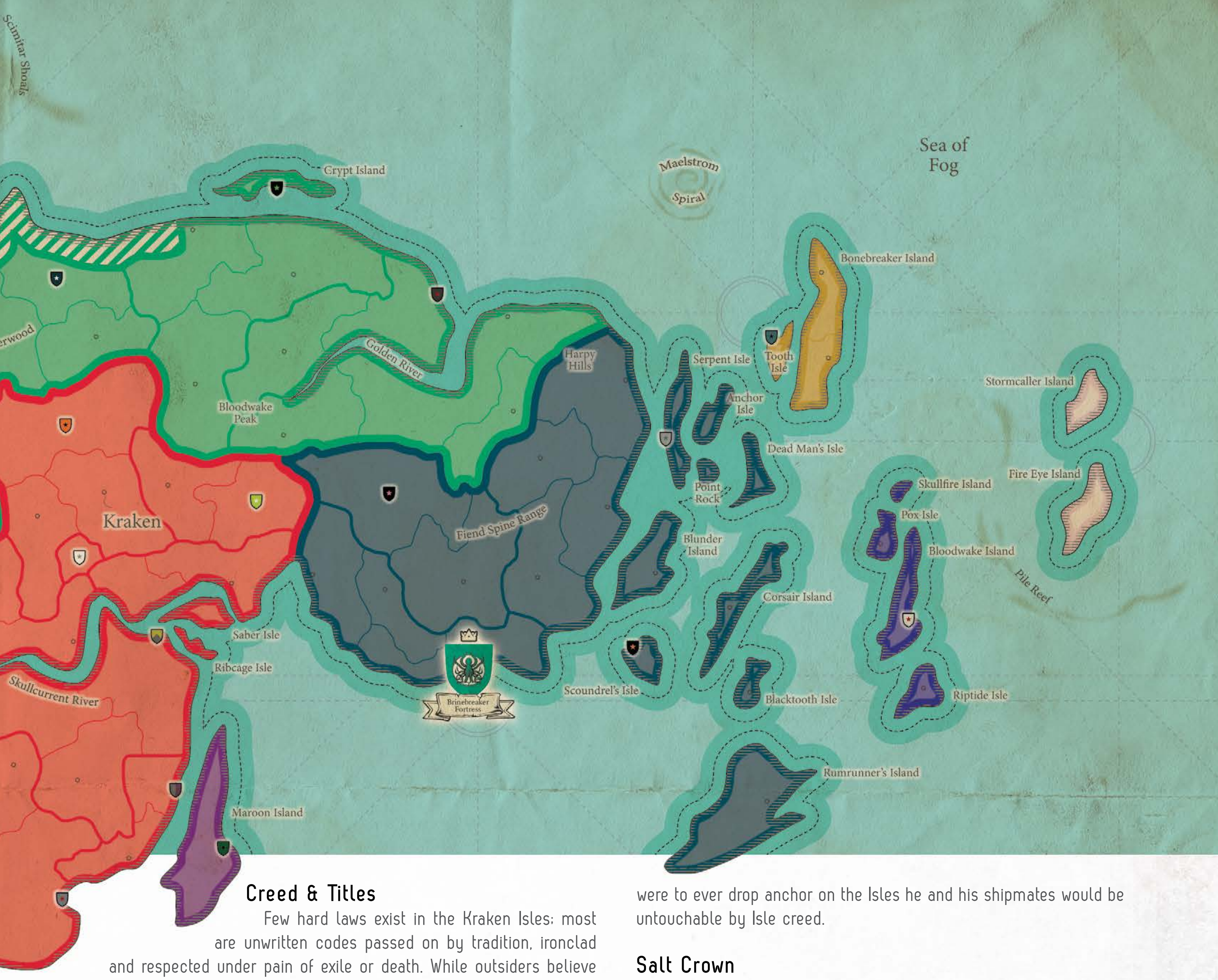
The folk of the Isles have a history that stretches back into the mists of legend; only after their conquering by the Catlan Empire did anyone think to chronicle these strange folk who called the wild islands home. A traitorous king banished by the Salt Folk would betray his former people to the ancient empire, dooming them to subjugation until the time of the devastating Druidic Wars. when even the far-flung Kraken Isles were not spared. That great conflict would see their people reduced to a scant few survivors, and yet, even drenched in sorrow and forced to rebuild from scraps of driftwood, the Salt Folk celebrated their final freedom. Where once they were forced to give lip service to the Eternal pantheon and foreign kings, they now serve the Salt Crown and openly esteem Corp above all gods, the hag of the seas. To this day Corp is praised across the Kraken Isles for her savage disposition, dominion over the oceans, love of plunder and cackling mockery of all attempts to bring her to heel... least of all her controlling husband Akh.

The **Nine Coalition** factions are the bedrock of the Salt Folk, unions bound not by blood, but by purpose. Each coalition is constantly clamouring for greater territory, richer resources and the first pick of the plunder on vulnerable coastal towns, but even in the midst of bickering and flaring civil conflicts, all people of the Isles have a deep connection to the ocean, born from the sheer necessity of island life. Newborn babes take their first breaths of salty air, important business is carried out with the sea as witness, and life is as ever-changing as the wind. Salt Folk are instantly recognisable everywhere they go, clad in rough clothing, their hair long and twisted into elaborate braids. This is partly practical – it allows for the weaving of all kinds of charms onto their person, creating a distinctive 'clink' as they move – but to mainland victims of their raids, it crafts a frightening image of bloodthirsty Remnant, their hair wild and billowing in a whirl of terrifying motion.



Crimson Eye Isle

Islands are dotted along the coast with cities of wood, thatch and metal, the air thick with scents of salt and freshly caught fish. Citizens are lovers of the outdoors, exuberant greetings, and a jaunty tune; to stroll along a dock or peruse a bustling marketplace is to be assailed from all sides by rowdy laughter and song, with even mundane tasks such as darning of socks is carried outdoors so as to join the social throng. Salt Folk are also notoriously fond of drink, with multiple taverns on every street of every town, and bartending is regarded as a noble and priest-like profession for the wisest of grizzled veterans. Brawls over money, card games, scorned love or simply for the thrill of it are common; as many would say, no evening out is quite complete without a hearty scrap.


Scimitar Shoals
Sea of Fog
Maelstrom Spiral
Crypt Island
Bonebreaker Island
erwood
Golden River
Harpy Hills
Serpent Isle
Tooth Isle
Anchor Isle
Stormcaller Island
Bloodwake Peak
Dead Man's Isle
Skullfire Island
Fire Eye Island
Point Rock
Pox Isle
Kraken
Fiend Spine Range
Blunder Island
Bloodwake Island
Pile Reef
Corsair Island
Saber Isle
Ribcage Isle
Brinebreaker Fortress
Scoundrel's Isle
Skullcurrent River
Blacktooth Isle
Riptide Isle
Rumrunner's Island
Maroon Island

Creed & Titles

Few hard laws exist in the Kraken Isles; most are unwritten codes passed on by tradition, ironclad and respected under pain of exile or death. While outsiders believe this makes the Kraken Isles utter bedlam, the codes allow for some semblance of peace, especially when the names of coalitions are invoked. Beneath the rowdy surface lies a complex web of inter-island politics that govern coalition territory, forming alliances, or taking brutal revenge for slights.

Vital to the code is the **Captain's Title**, treated with utmost reverence and is possibly the most sacred of all Isle traditions. Only a precious few captains are destined to gain a title, earned by one of only three acts: amassing a legendary wealth of plunder, slaying a great Krakenspawn monster, or fulfilling a legendary feat in service of the Salt Crown.

'Blazebeard', 'Lady of Crimson and Silk', 'One-Shot Kenshaw'; these names echo into the future, carried on song and written in the wind. A captain with a title is safe in every Salt Folk harbour, drinks for free in all taverns and controversially does not even need to be born of the Kraken Isles. **Captain "Ironhook" Jackson** of the hated South Fog Trading Guild gained his title after he killed a massive Krakenspawn beast. Ironhook still fights with many pirates, but if he were to ever drop anchor on the Isles he and his shipmates would be untouchable by Isle creed.

Salt Crown

The Salt Crown is the greatest symbol of authority in the Kraken Isles; insofar as the isles have any form of rulership, Salt King or Queen is the ultimate authority, demanding loyalty and a share of booty in exchange for protecting the Kraken Isles from invaders. Claiming this title is only possible in the **Maelstrom Gambit**, a contest held every ten years at the largest whirlpool in the Kraken Isles. Known as **Maelstrom Spiral**, the area is blanketed in an eternal storm said to be conjured by Corp's greed. Those wishing to fight for the Salt Crown must plunge their ships into the depths of Fury's Spiral, battling their brethren, the current ruler's vessel and the storm itself to emerge victorious. The last to emerge – all others having fled the battle or been reduced to corpses and driftwood – is declared ruler supreme.

Stormcaller & Fire Eye Islands

Guarded by cliffs, reefs, and the fire-and-storm warriors of Fari, the watchtowers of Stormcaller and Fire Eye Islands remain untouchable to the Kraken Isle Pirates. Constantly tracking their ships and preventing them from ever becoming a critical threat to the Twi-Far homelands.

Daskraken Coalition

- **Ruler:** Salt Queen Natoya "Black Moon" Mvura (Remnant).
- **Capital:** Brinebreaker Fortress.
- **Subject Species:** Primarily Remnant.
- **Cultural Notes:**
  - Many well-guarded ports.
  - Rivals with the Briggan coalition.
- **Legal Notes:**
  - Rulers of the Salt Folk.
- **Economic Strengths:** Piracy, political influence, wealth.

Beneath a blood-red sunset, Black Moon stood tall at the helm, her dark hair glinting beneath the weight of stolen jewels. Golden charms were woven into her matted fur, and emerald rings adorned her clawed hands. Hardened sailors, scarred by salt and cannon fire, lowered their eyes as she passed, for she ruled through fear as sharp as her cutlass – and respect, hard-earned in battle. They whispered of her wrath at Shark's Maw Reef, where she sank a mutinous ship with all aboard. Her voice, cold as the deep sea, rang out, "Steady, lads and lasses. Cowards will feed the sharks." None dared falter. To serve the Salt Queen was to live by her will – or perish beneath it. The sea knew her name, and trembled.

– Edmund Drakewell,
battle of Corpse Cove.

By tradition, the Maelstrom Gambit is open to challengers from all coalitions. The Salt Crown could be awarded to anyone with the grit and skill to survive. And yet, for the past two centuries, the Daskraken have utterly dominated the competition, to the point where many now believe that Corp herself has destined the Crown to never leave their head for more than a decade. For this, and many other reasons, the Daskraken coalition are by far the most fearsome force in the Kraken Isles, demanding a share from every plunder, commanding respect from every captain, and ruling unquestioned from their fortress capital.

At the dawn of the Druidic War, it was the great House of Daskraken who saw an opportunity to break away from their masters, not to join the Druids but to seize their freedom. Too long had the Catla Empire relied upon the Salt Folk for all their seabound affairs, and when the dust settled, the shattered remnants of the Kraken Isles united under Daskraken's banner to rebuild their society. Sharpened by the flint of oppression and near-annihilation, the Daskrakens turned their aggression towards the outside world, scoring plunder and victory through a string of increasingly vicious raids. The family's bold actions gained them a legion of allies, resulting in the creation of the first of many coalitions.

A Pirate's Life

The Daskraken coalition is famed for their raiding prowess, striking Akharon's coasts and merchant ships without mercy and vanishing with armfuls of plunder back to their ships before their hapless victims can rally. Daskraken's reputation on the high seas is one of dread, with many sailors even opting for a swift surrender at the first glimpse of the coalition's flag on the horizon. Whether surrender is accepted is a matter of whim; as the Daskraken are ill-disposed towards cowards who refuse to fight.

Their captains will make great journeys across the seas to seek out treasure and plunder, falling upon unsuspecting seaside towns like lightning and sowing terror in their wake. The coalition's captains are seemingly blessed with the ability to sniff out hordes of valuables, a gift known locally as **'Corp's Compass'**. This is one of the traits highly favoured when the coalition recruits new members, alongside a cunning approach to conflict, a wealth of plunder and a fierce loyalty to their Salt Queen.

Other coalitions fall in and out of favour with Daskraken, alliances rising and receding like the tide. The Briggan coalition shares an especially terse relationship with the incumbent rulers; vital for the supply of cannons and firearms, but eternally chafing under their rule and desiring the crown for themselves. This open secret is a source of much speculation and mirth, birthing the stereotype of Briggan struggling beneath Daskraken's boot heel. Nevertheless, Daskraken's leaders are by nature shrewd negotiators; along with the respect commanded by the Salt Queen, their raids on the mainland are the best planned and best equipped, spreading their fearsome name across the high seas.

Lost Crown

Daskraken's ultimate goal is the retrieval of the original Salt Crown, a sacred magical artefact that dates back to the primordial Age of Darkness. Taken from them during their days of subjugation to the ancient Empire of Catla. It is now thought to be held in a locked vault beneath the city of Stronghold (pg: 69) that now lies under the rule of the demigod dragon king Languorem. This great raid has been centuries in the making, as the coalition bides its time and builds strength to take back their lost treasure.

Salt Queen & the Brinebreaker Fortress

The coalition have claimed a long string of victories in the Maelstrom Gambit, and the current Salt Queen is no exception. **Queen Natoya "Black Moon" Mvura** made history when she chose to stay within the storm for a day and a night, even after her victory, proving herself and her crew to be more than worthy to bear the crown.

Members of Daskraken call the Brinebreaker Fortress home, and it is from here that Lady Natoya directs many of the Kraken Isles' seafaring operations – most of them nefarious. As the largest city in the Kraken Isles, the Fortress is a jungle of wood and steel buildings, its streets winding around the outside of a churning volcano with the Daskraken's stronghold embedded where the lava flows into the sea. The coalition's treasure trove of plunder is jaw-dropping in scale, sequestered within labyrinthine caves that run right into the heart of the volcano. Many have attempted to breach these caves; most have failed, their bodies hurled out into the boiling waters and erased from history.

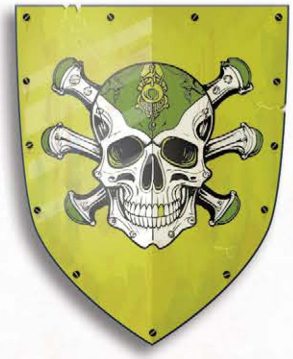
Briggan Coalition

- **Ruler:** Jeremiah "Smoke Beard" Briggan (Kaltoran).
- **Capital:** Iron Fort.
- **Subject Species:** Primarily Kaltoran and Tolatl.
- **Cultural Notes:**
  - Many of their ancestors were refugees from the mainland during the Drudic War
  - Master craftsmen of metal and firearms.
  - Rivals with the Daskraken coalition.
  - Slow and well-armed ships.
- **Economic Strengths:** firearms, metalwork.

Refugees during the Druidic War, the Kaltoran family of Briggan and their Tolatl allies pledged their loyalty to the Salt Crown and swiftly gained favour as they pooled their skills; marrying ingenuity with hard work to develop a reputation as master craftsman. Their overflowing chests of gold would inflate Briggan's pride, causing them to try their fortunes in the Maelstrom Gambit. The result was one of the most devastating defeats in the contest's long history. To further rub salt into their wounds, their homes were plundered by rivals and they were driven off the mainland. Gathering together the battered remains of their fleet, they explored the smaller isles for any patch of dirt to call their own. Their search for safety may have been a failure, but what they found instead was something of greater value: opportunity.

When discovered, it was an ancient divine ruin of Corp, a monolithic sea of spires jutting from the earth, drenched in foul rumours and guarded by great metal golems. Desperation and innovation pushed Briggan to slay the golems and transform the ruin into the thriving industrial centre known as the **Iron Fort**: a bustling hub of manufacturing that is now heavily depended upon by the rest of the Kraken Isles. Theirs are the greatest cannons and cheapest firearms that money can buy.

The Kaltorans of the Briggan family were always miners and smiths of great skill. The raw materials found within the ancient husk gave them everything they needed to reestablish themselves as indispensable allies to the Salt Crown. In addition to their mastery of firearms and cannons, Briggan sail the seas in unique ships of gleaming steel; slow, but buoyant and resilient against all attacks. The Iron Fort has little room for expansion, but Briggan has welcomed many non-Kaltorans into their coalition and more than makes up for their lack of numbers with the strength of their industry… along with a burning desire to reclaim their pride.



Malastra Coalition

- See Ta'Di write-up on pg: 194.

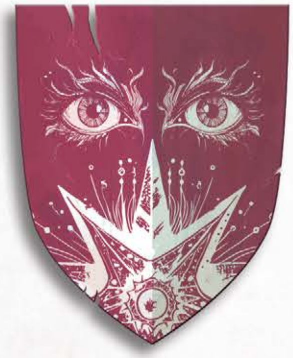
- **Ruler:** Sipho "Night Warlock" Rima (Remnant).
- **Capital:** Cauldron Anchorage
- **Subject Species:** Primarily Remnant.
- **Cultural Notes:**
  - Many skilled enchanters.
  - Never overt allies or enemies to other coalitions.
- **Economic Strengths:** Superstitious insight.

The history of the Malastra coalition is long, sordid and steeped in malcontent, pungent enough to bleed into their capital city of **Cauldron Anchorage** and coat their islands in a thick miasma. And yet, while unpopular party guests in the rest of the Kraken Isles, the members of the Malastra coalition have proven their worth time and time again with their mastery of the most mysterious enchantments.

In the distant past, many Remnant of Malastra were the 'Si': shepherds of the third Wild River and part of the trinity that comprised the Ta'Di'Si. While most of their ancestors travelled to the continent of Catlan and turned to the pagan All-Faith, those who travelled to the Kraken Isles rejected the fey spirits and turned to dark magics to slake their lust for power. If the Si were ever to be returned to the Ta'Di, Malastra would have to abandon their dark path and reconnect with the fey of Akharon.

Today, the city of Cauldron Anchorage stands as a testament to the forsaking of their former duties: a foreboding collection of domed stone buildings, near-constantly shrouded in fog and lit by eerie werelights. Its inhabitants are steeped in eldritch knowledge from birth, sailing the seas in blackwood boats that seem to follow their own course, regardless of prevailing winds. **Scions of Malastra** are always a distinctive sight, adorned with glinting talismans with eyes that seem to pierce flesh and bone. Even when civil war flares up between the coalitions, Malastra are often left alone, few willing to enlist them as allies or challenge them as rivals.

Only a hair's breadth to the east lies the **Siren Isles**, under the eternal rulership of the **Revenant Siren**. A ghostly pirate queen of extraordinary power, she and her spectral buccaneers remain a constant threat to the Kraken Isles, kept in check only by Malastra's mysterious enchantments and constant vigilance. Malastra's powers have been forged to a keen edge by this constant conflict, and their charm-work is second to none.



Eastern Twi-Far

- See Drasong Clan write-up from pg: 139.
- See Peridil write-up on pg: 202.

"Through the fog, far beyond the waves, we heeded the song of flame. It called us to a new beginning. It called us home."
– Ember Sage Kalinda Fireborne,
opening of the Firebird Festival.

Infinite in mystery are the far-flung volcanic islands of Fari and Eyna, adopted home of the Twi-Far, dwelling of **Peridil** the Phoenix Lord and birthplace of the Ta'Di religion. Sequestered across the Sea of Fog, the twin islands are utterly removed from the continent of Catlan, giving rise to fanciful rumours. Some say they are drenched in otherworldly sorcery; others claim that ancient spirits rule; still more tell of fantastic magic gifted by visitors from the stars.

Beyond all fanciful myths, the Twi-Far of Fari and Eyna must fight for their place in the world like any other, trading with who they will, fending off enemies where they must, and praising the Phoenix Lord for his provision and protection.

A Perilous Voyage

In the aftermath of the great Twi-Far scattering after **Faren Drasong** struck the gods, swathes of Twi-Far chose to leave the Blood Stone Desert and seek out new lands to call home. Most turned their sights upon the ocean and it was only by the grace of the great storm spirit **Collopsi** – at Peridil's behest – that their rickety boats made it over the vast Sea of Fog to join those that remained of their forgotten kin on the shores of twin volcanic isles.

They were far from paradise: the smaller isle was wild and infested with fire-breathing salamanders, while the other was vast and housed many temperamental spirits. And yet, this was a fresh start, fertile ground for two great nations. Isolation spared the burgeoning Twi-Far from the horrors of the ancient Empire of Catla and the Druidic War, and by the time they established tentative trading routes with the distant Catlan continent, they would find many old threats swept away by the ravages of time.

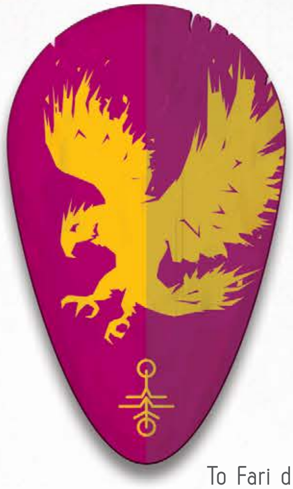
Twin Isles, One Heart

Over time the cultures of the Twi-Far would diverge, each island drawing in people and spirits who shared common values and ideals to create two distinct nations. There is little conflict between them and each is led by an Ember Sage who is appointed by their respective ruling class.

- **Truth:** These two nations evolved out of the Phoenix and Salamander Symphonies.

Beasts & Pirates

To the south, the Daskraken Pirates remain a scourge preying upon Twi-Far, harassing their already-perilous trade routes and requiring a pair of sea-bound outposts on the islands of Stormvaller and Fire Eye to provide early warnings.

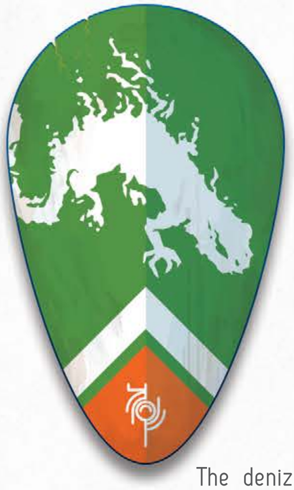


Fari

- **Ruler:** Ember Sage Kalinda Fireborne (Twi-Far).
- **Capital:** Resplendent Tempest.
- **Subject Species:**
  - Primarily Twi-Far.
- **Cultural Notes:**
  - Value new things, especially exploration and learning.
  - Many Ta'Di seers.
- **Economic Strengths:**
  - Fish, trade, maps.

To Fari drift the dreamers and explorers, lovers of new lands, spirits, ideas and experimental art. They bask in the close presence of the Phoenix Lord, breathing deep the magic-tinged breeze that drifts along their long shores and many wild lands.

The realm of Fari is vast and their people are the most commonly seen by Catlan nations due to their numerous traders. Most of their cities and towns reside on the coast, though there are numerous small villages that dot their large forests. Food and resources are plentiful on Fari, though wild spirits, typhoons, active volcanoes and the occasional Troll do cause them trouble.



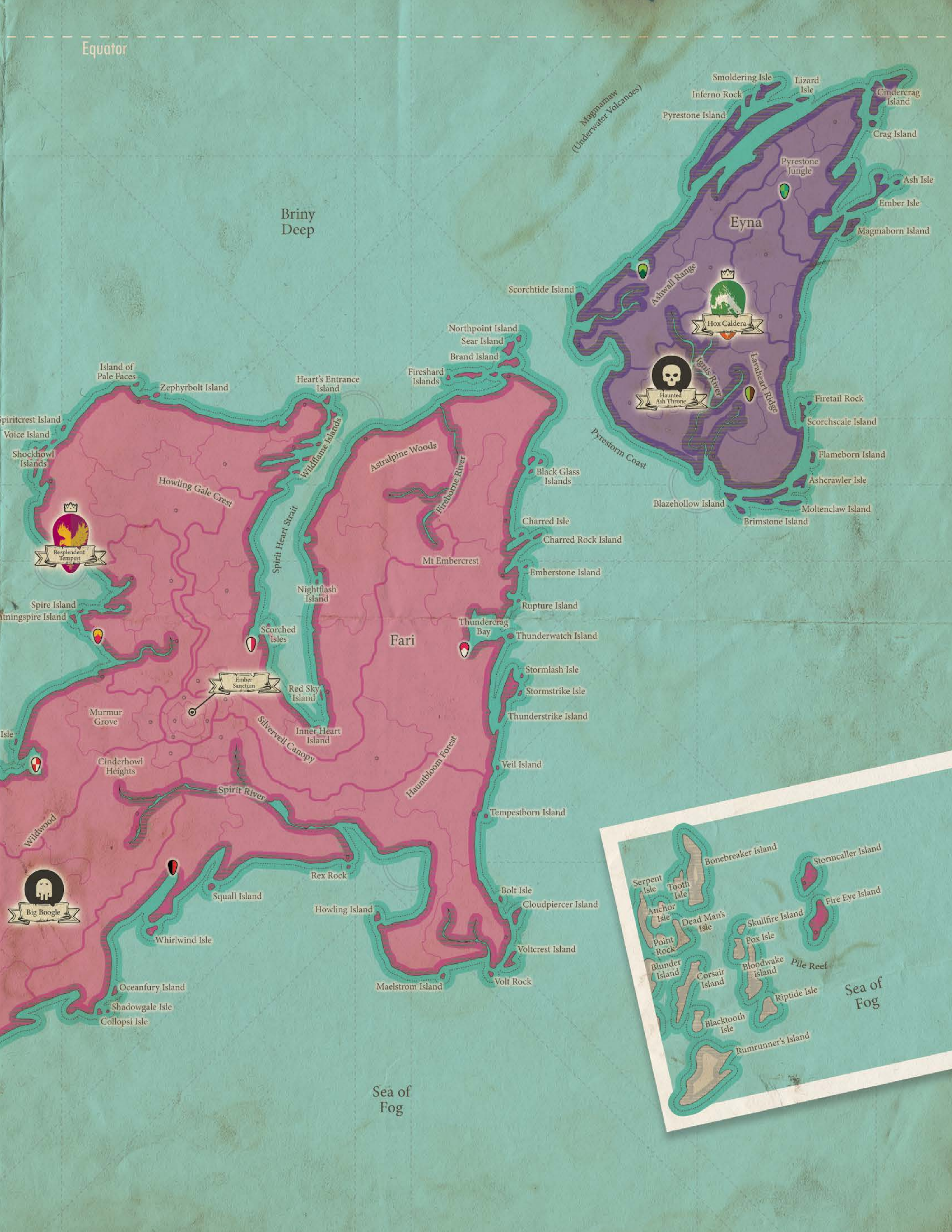
Eyna

- **Ruler:** Ember Sage Petro Sternstorm (Twi-Far).
- **Capital:** Hox Caldera.
- **Subject Species:**
  - Primarily Twi-Far.
- **Cultural Notes:**
  - Value depth of skill, especially craftsmanship.
  - Large families.
- **Economic Strengths:**
  - Industry, potions, metalwork.

The denizens of Eyna are far more given to practical matters and draw satisfaction from mastery of a vocation, dwelling on their inner selves and the refinement of the known. Their culture focuses upon industry, defence, farming, highly detailed art, elixirs and home life.

The iron-willed determination of Eyna's citizens has allowed them to tame many of the ferocious salamanders that nest and roam their mountainous island. The island is also known for the double-edged sword of its fantastical flora, allowing for the development of incredible medicines and alchemical potions, if one may brave snapping plant jaws, poisonous plants, volcanoes and unpredictable nature spirits.

Lig
Wave
Shock Isle
Rainshroud Island
Darksky Island
Wraithwind Island
Boltstrike Island
Thunderflash Island
Tempest Range


Equator
Briny Deep
Magmamaw (Underwater Volcanoes)
Smoldering Isle
Lizard Isle
Inferno Rock
Cindercrag Island
Pyrestone Island
Crag Island
Pyrestone Jungle
Ash Isle
Ember Isle
Eyna
Magmaborn Island
Ashwall Range
Scorchtide Island
Hox Caldera
Igniss River
Lavaheart Ridge
Haunted Ash Throne
Firetail Rock
Scorchscale Island
Pyrestorm Coast
Flameborn Island
Ashcrawler Isle
Blazehollow Island
Moltenclaw Island
Brimstone Island
Northpoint Island
Sear Island
Brand Island
Fireshard Islands
Heart's Entrance Island
Island of Pale Faces
Zephyrbolt Island
piritcrest Island
Voice Island
Shockhowl Islands
Wildflame Islands
Astralpine Woods
Fireborne River
Howling Gale Crest
Black Glass Islands
Spirit Heart Strait
Charred Isle
Charred Rock Island
Resplendent Tempest
Mt Embercrest
Emberstone Island
Nightflash Island
Spire Island
tningspire Island
Rupture Island
Scorched Isles
Thundercrag Bay
Thunderwatch Island
Fari
Stormlash Isle
Ember Sanctum
Red Sky Island
Stormstrike Isle
Murmur Grove
Thunderstrike Island
Isle
Inner Heart Island
Silverveil Canopy
Cinderhowl Heights
Hauntbloom Forest
Veil Island
Spirit River
Wildwood
Tempestborn Island
Rex Rock
Big Boogle
Squall Island
Bolt Isle
Howling Island
Cloudpiercer Island
Whirlwind Isle
Voltcrest Island
Oceanfury Island
Maelstrom Island
Volt Rock
Shadowgale Isle
Collopsi Isle
Sea of Fog
Bonebreaker Island
Stormcaller Island
Serpent Isle
Tooth Isle
Anchor Isle
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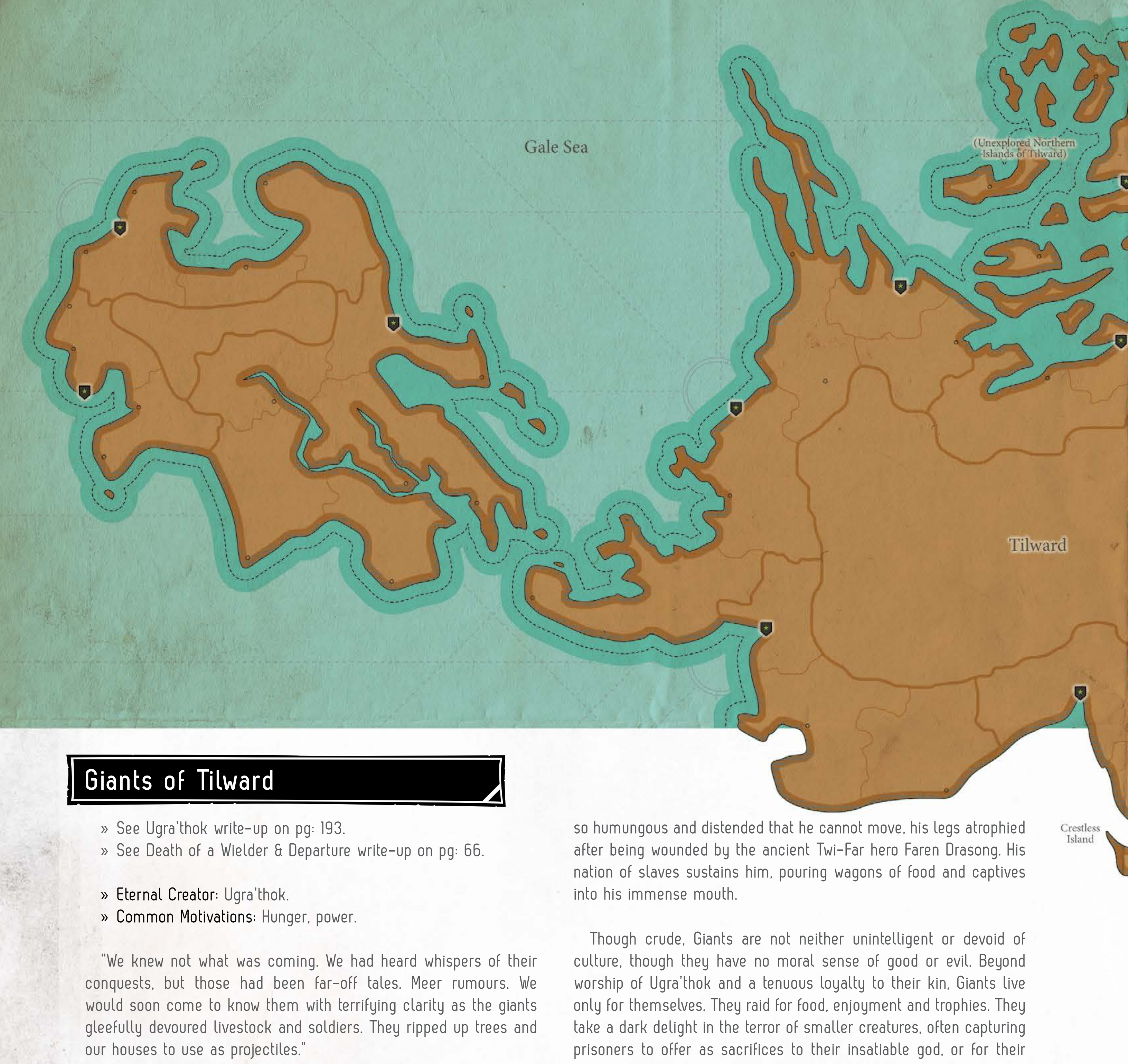


Giants of Tilward

» See Ugra'thok write-up on pg: 193.
» See Death of a Wielder & Departure write-up on pg: 66.

- **Eternal Creator:** Ugra'thok.
- **Common Motivations:** Hunger, power.

> "We knew not what was coming. We had heard whispers of their conquests, but those had been far-off tales. Meer rumours. We would soon come to know them with terrifying clarity as the giants gleefully devoured livestock and soldiers. They ripped up trees and our houses to use as projectiles."
>
> – Commander Elias Bard.

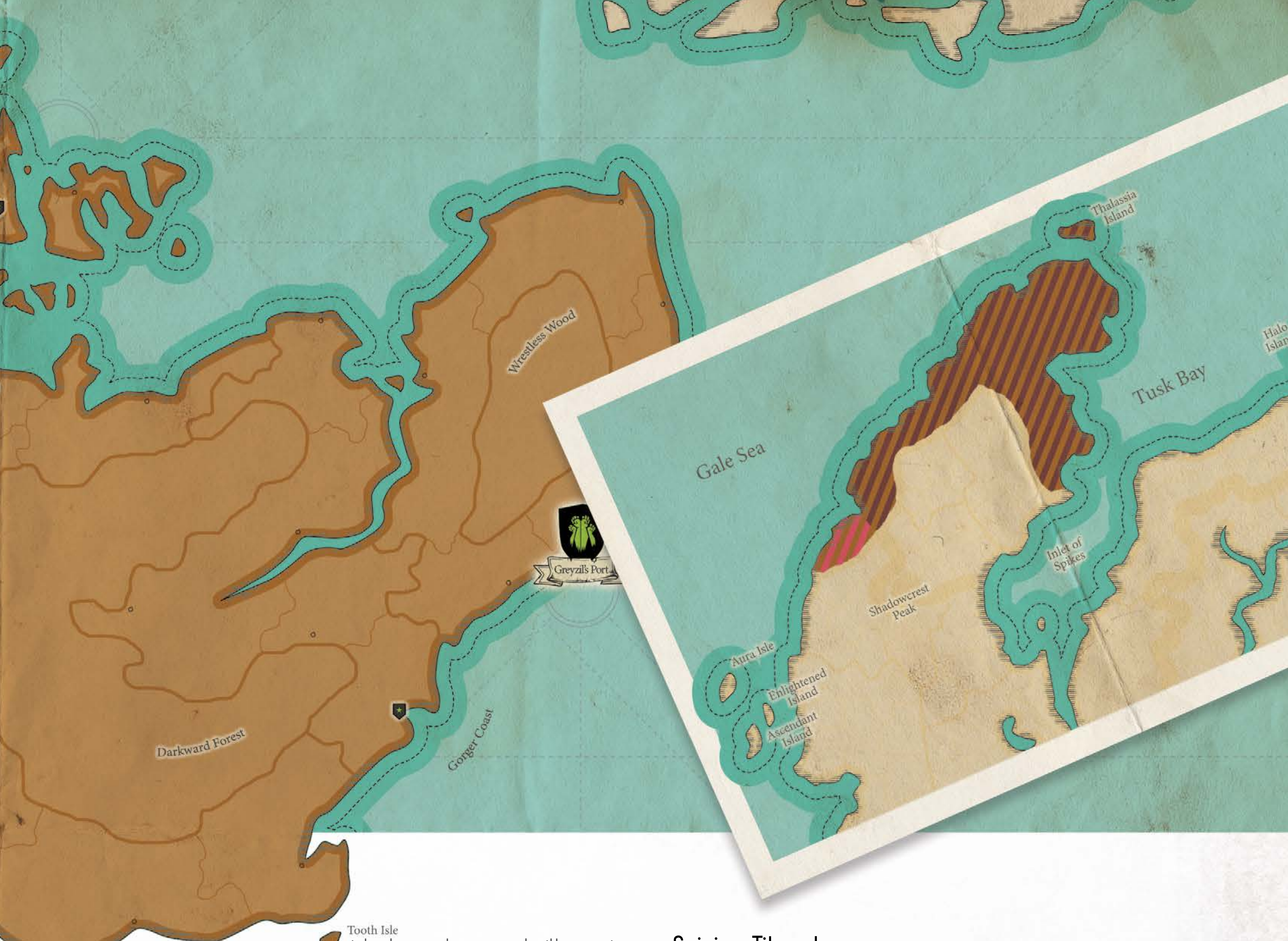
The Giants are a collection of supersized, bipedal monstrosities. They tower above the other species and their footsteps shake the earth with every step. To feed their mammoth bulk, they must consume vast quantities of food. While they prefer meat, they are not picky and have been known to eat bones and entire trees if nothing else is available.

The Giants inherit their voracious appetite from Ugra'thok, their creator and god of consumption. The very physical and present Ugra'thok lies at the centre of a giant city far to the west across the Gale Sea, a huge, four-armed monster as large as a mountain. He is so humungous and distended that he cannot move, his legs atrophied after being wounded by the ancient Twi-Far hero Faren Drasong. His nation of slaves sustains him, pouring wagons of food and captives into his immense mouth.

Though crude, Giants are not neither unintelligent or devoid of culture, though they have no moral sense of good or evil. Beyond worship of Ugra'thok and a tenuous loyalty to their kin, Giants live only for themselves. They raid for food, enjoyment and trophies. They take a dark delight in the terror of smaller creatures, often capturing prisoners to offer as sacrifices to their insatiable god, or for their own entertainment – keeping them as pets or playthings.

Giants have established a great nation on the continent of Mammon around the torpid body of Ugra'thok. Their cities are chaotic and vast, with colossal buildings rising haphazardly across the landscape. Crude roads cross their territories but always lead to great plazas that are used for gathering food and victims to be sacrificed to their god.

They keep Chompers as slaves, pets, and occasionally snacks as the mood strikes them. Their population clusters most densely along the coast, the only environment capable of sustaining their immense appetite. Here, they trawl the seas with gargantuan nets or wade



into deep waters armed with massive spears to hunt sea monsters and great fish. Some giants become so intertwined with the ocean's bounty that they spend the majority of their lives in its depths.

In recent years, the coastal territories of the giants have been devastated by the dragon Nelthrezad. Her aquatic minions – including many Dracim, drakes and wyverns – have overrun much of the giants' traditional hunting grounds, leaving them starved and vulnerable. Unable to drive Nelthrezad off, the giants turned their gaze eastward, seeking fertile lands and unspoiled waters.

Their first conquest was the great isle of Tilward, wrested from a fledgling nation and shadow spirits. Now their sights are set on the Holy Kingdom of Catla. Their brute strength would be terrifying enough, but the Giants of Tilward have augmented their advance with siege weaponry, bringing massive catapults and hand-held ballistas to bear. Their colossal warships, though crude and ponderous, are terrifying in their design – many built upon the skeletal remains of great sea monsters, their frames a grim testament to the Giants' dominion over the deep. Their forces swell with each passing month, as new titanic warriors and swarms of Chomper slaves sail over from Tilward and Mammon, bolstering an army that may grow to threaten more than just the Holy Kingdom.

Seizing Tilward

The large island of Tilward off the western coast of the Holy Kingdom remained unexplored and unclaimed during the time of the ancient Empire of Catla. Following the Drudic War many refugees settled there and formed a fledgling nation, but before they could reconnect with the burgeoning Holy Kingdom they were attacked by Giants sailing from the land of Mammon. There may yet still be survivors in the centre of Tilward, as the Giants prefer the coastal lands and have turned their attention to the continent of Catlan.

Tilward is also home to many ethereal shadow spirits who live in caves and move about at night. Giants hate ethereal spirits as they are closely associated with Twi-Far, and have sought to root them out and desecrate their homes. The spirits are angry and will lash out at anyone who comes near.

The Giants are spread thin across Tilward: hunting for food and generally enjoying freedom away from each other's company. Giants do not like each other, and their leader – high priest **Greyzil the Six-Armed** – is struggling to gather them together to build ships to sail over to attack the Holy Kingdom of Catla. Greyzil is immensely powerful and no Giant would dare to disobey a direct command from him, but many have quietly decided that they do not need to obey his messengers.

Invasion of the Holy Kingdom of Catla

- » See Bard write-up on pg: 116.
- » See Boon write-up on pg: 112.

The great House of Bard and the Holy Kingdom of Catla were completely unprepared to defend themselves against the Giants that struck their land shortly after the end of the civil war that formed the Kingdom of Ire. Bard is a hardy house, and despite the fall of their capital city of **Har Govoah** they, and their neighbouring House Boon allies, were able to halt the Giant's advance.

For almost a decade this land has been scarred by endless war. Bones of fallen soldiers, Giants and Chompers are scattered among crumbling trenches, palisades, wooden fortresses and siege engines. All rebuilt a dozen times over as battle lines have washed over them in both directions. No grand armies march here – only ever-shifting fronts, where skirmishes flare and fade, and trebuchets hurl stone in distant but irregular bursts. The air is thick with the tension of perpetual unrest. Occasionally, a Giant or an opportunistic force of men-at-arms surges forward, breaking the stillness with violent speed, only to disappear back into the ever-changing chaos. It is a place of constant battle, where war never ends and neither side has the resources to claim victory.

Multi-Limbed Throggar Priests

Giants born with multiple arms – even if they are twisted and vestigial – are seen as blessed and set aside by Ugra'thok to be his priests. Known as Throggars, these holy giants are seen as conduits for their god's divine will. The Giants of Mammon hate all other gods as they betrayed their creator, and they refuse to use their magic.

Throggars are well-educated and tend to work as enforces of divine law, advisors to larger ruling giants and cooks for elite Giants. The most important task for a Throggar is to sacrifice animals and people to Ugra'thok, ideally casting their victims screaming into his gaping mouth. In more distant lands, sacrifices on altars of bone and insect corpses are still seen as acceptable, though not ideal.

Insects are seen as physical manifestations of Ugra'thok's favour. Battlefields littered with maggot-filled corpses, swarms of flies encircling sacrificial altars, and festering swamps are considered holy ground that bring glory to Ugra'thok.

Chomper Slaves

- » See Twisted Chomper write-up on pg: 125.

The lands of Mammon are awash with Chompers, with some regions so ravaged by mega-colonies that they are regularly forced to cull and devour one another to avoid starvation. The Giants collect large swaths to live short and pitiful lives as slaves and food. They are naturally stupid and destructive creatures, but their minds elevate under Giant rule. This allows them to be of some use as workers, builders, hunters and warriors. Despite their lowly place in society, Chompers are far crueller than any of their master.

New Connections

- » See Twisted Forest write-up on pg: 118.
- » See Jötnar Giants write-up on pg: 168.

The Giants of Mammon have long remained disconnected from other lands. Their new foothold on Tilward has exposed them to many potential allies and enemies, most complex of all are other Giants who lack their direct connection to Ugra'thok. They are tempted to bring their lost kin into the fold, though they are wary of corruption.

Twisted Giants

Giants deep within the dark Twisted Forest are nomadic and wander alone, lost and estranged from their kin. Generations of exposure to wylding magic has twisted and marred their bodies. Some have learnt to harness this power, using it to distort themselves and their beastial pets in advantageous ways, such as poison breath, spine-covered skin, impenetrable hides or extra limbs. Others have mutated randomly, becoming gnarled, twisted things, beasts of many eyes and tentacled appendages. Breeding with Neph Spawn has only accelerated these mutations. All semblance of society and language has left such creatures, replaced with gibbering and pure primal instincts, though these Giants remain cunning and keen-eyed.

Arctic Jötnar

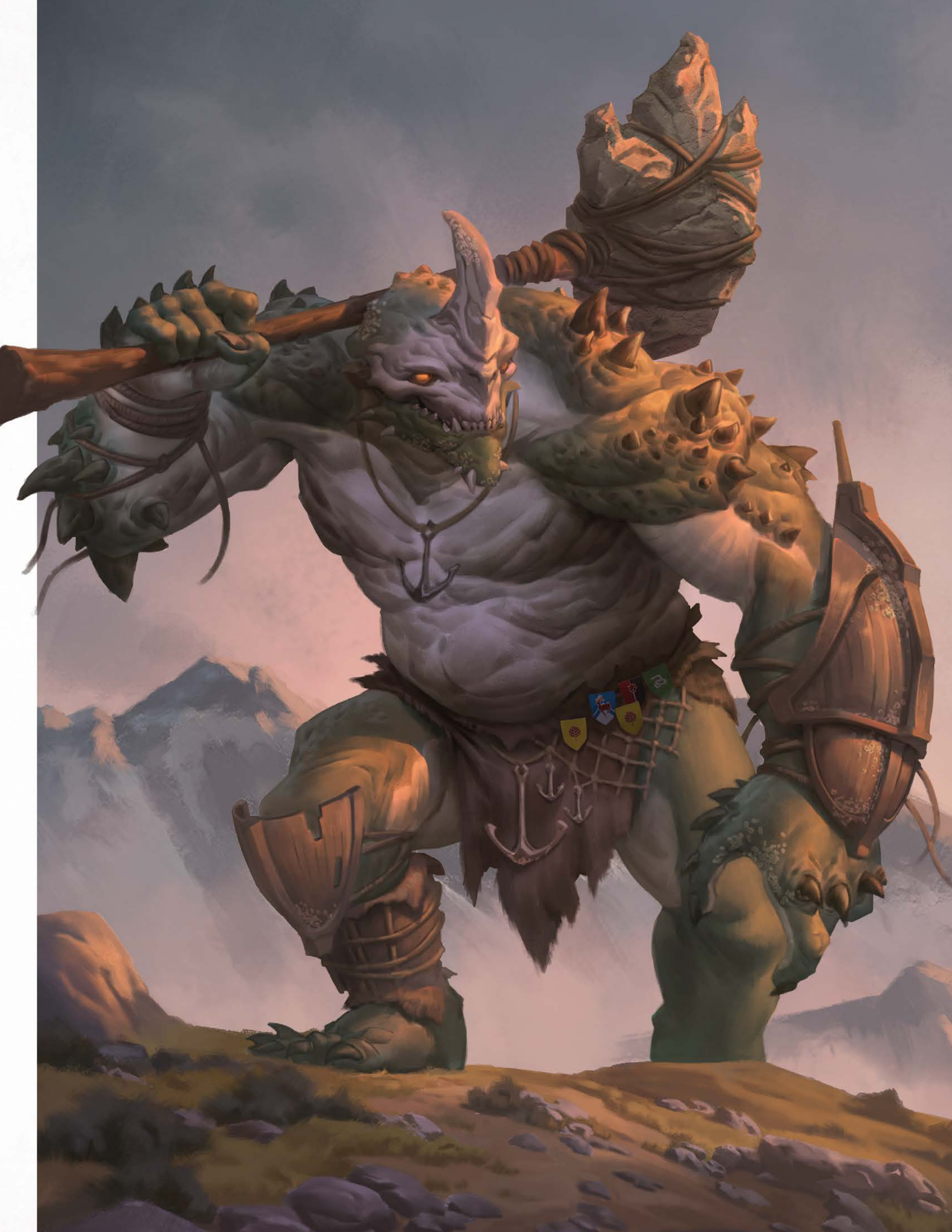
The mystical Jötnar of the White Expanse tower above all other creatures and are guided by prophetic dreams. They are on the brink of extinction, have been forced into an alliance with Frost Trolls and flirt with heretical magic. Though most troubling of all is their **Slumbering King**, who whispers in his endless sleep of ending all Giants.

Questionable Origin

Scholars see Giants as a kind of Neph Spawn – possibly due to some unknown ancient connection between Ugra'thok and the dead goddess of nature – as they are receptive to wylding, prone to mutation, have many comparable physical attributes and can breed with Neph Spawn. Giants rarely pay attention to the babblings of cattle (aka: other people), but they have noted this slur against their nature and their god. They hate Neph as they hate all other gods, and reject any connection between them and her.

- » **Truth**: Giants are a range of genetically engineered Nephilim (especially Gargantuans) who have interbred to create a number of particularly large strains. Their god Ugra'thok is a mountain-sized Oni who is preventing the giants from going completely feral.

> "We are facing only a vanguard. Should the full might of the giants descend upon us, our entire kingdom may be doomed."
>
> – Lady Hannah Bard.



Southern Legion Tribes

- See Ath write-up from pg: 182.

- **Ruler:** High-Jarl Eirik Bloodmane: Lord of Ice and Blood (Legion).
- **Capital:** God's Fang.
- **Subject Species:** Primarily Legion.
- **Cultural Notes:**
  - Venerate Ath above all other gods.
    - Perform blood sacrifices to her.
  - Slavery is common (known as thralls).
- **Legal Notes:**
  - Currently ruled by the Blood Horns tribe.
  - Many laws do not apply to those of higher social status.
  - Fines and duals are commonly used to settle disputes.
- **Economic Strengths:** Fishing, labour (thrall slaves), raiding.

> "True Legion don't cower behind walls of stone and bow to the whims of little Tolatl. We sail the seas, carve our legacies into ice and face death with steel in hand. Those weaklings in the north have abandoned our goddess Ath, forsaking honour, strength and freedom for soft beds and fat bellies."
>
> – Astrid Stoneshore,
> the skald of Stonebay.

Since the time of their creation, the Legion have long been drawn to harsh lands and cold waters as a means of quenching their inner fire. The tribes of the vast southern White Expanse are diverse, strong and brutal folk. Made hard by their harsh frozen realm and centuries of conflict with the northern 'civilised' nations.

They are seafarers, warriors, traders, hunters and explorers whose influence has spread far and wide. Guided by tradition, communal bonds, loyalty to the goddess Ath and driven by a thirst for freedom and power, the Southern Tribes have forged a unique culture that is rich in art, storytelling and a deep understanding of what it is to be a Legion.

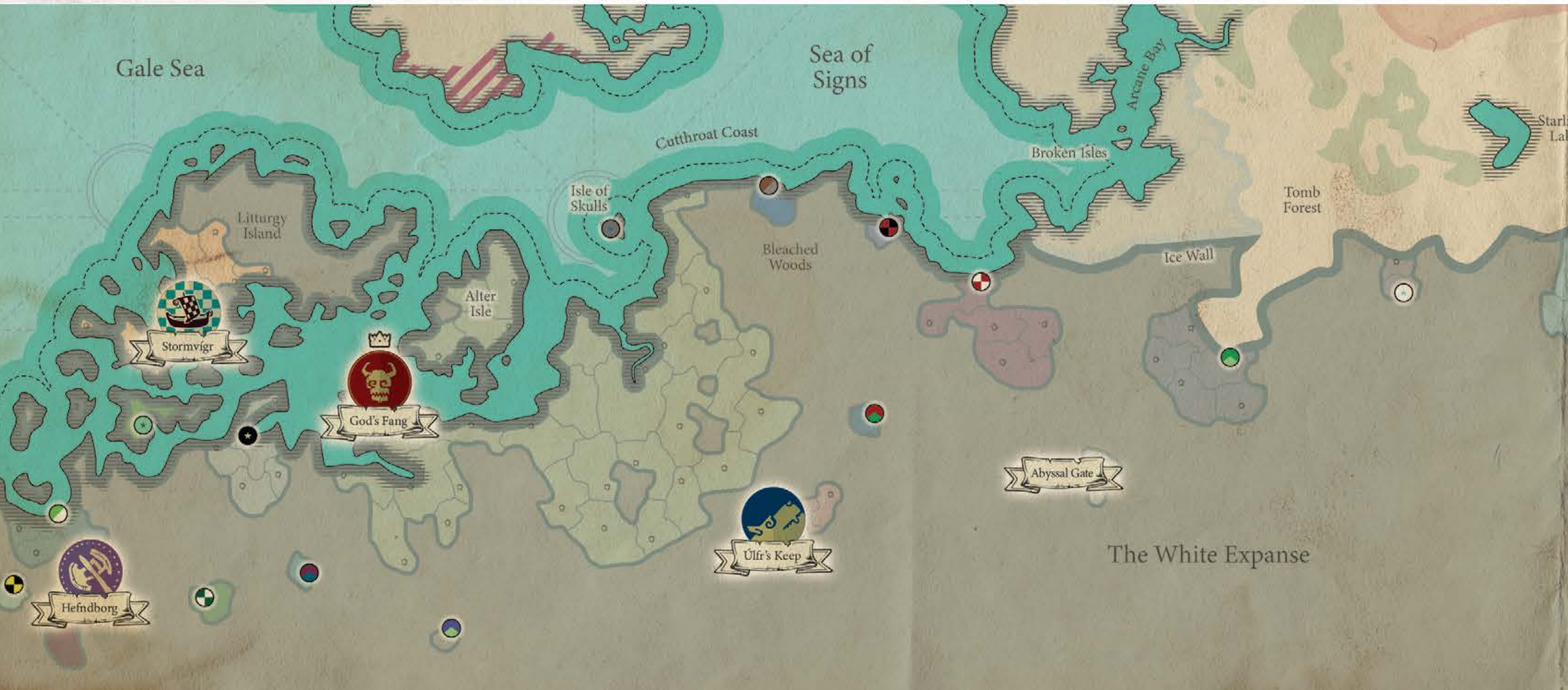
They have also been reminded again and again that drudgery and peace are a Legion's greatest foes; not Jötnar giants, Frost Trolls or armies of northern steel. In the past, they have made alliances with the northern nations, such as the Archdruid during the Druidic War and the Kingdom of Catla in its aftermath. Both almost brought a complete end to their people.

Seeing the rot within his kin, **High-Jarl Ragnar Fangmore** of the Blood Horn tribe sparked a civil war; severing their ties to the weak northerners and brought all Legion Tribes to heel through force. His people returned to their traditional ways and flourished. Jarl Fangmore's reign was short and soaked in blood, but he is hailed as a hero who saved the Southern Tribes from northern spies, manipulation and exploitation. The body of Ragnar is entombed within a sarcophagus beneath **God's Fang**; a great red metal structure that was built by the goddess Ath during the Age of Illumination.

Veneration & Arrival of Ath

Until the death of Neph, the Southern Tribes had always worshipped those that they considered to be the two strongest of the Eternal gods: Ath and Neph. They believe that Neph died to Ath and not Fik, and that Ath and not Akh is the true ruler of the Eternal Pantheon. They emphasize Ath's dominion over war and not her wisdom. As Ath's favour in the north diminishes, her status in the south grows ever stronger. This has reached the point where she is seen almost exclusively as a goddess of barbarians.

The worship of Ath in the southern lands reached a fever pitch when the goddess herself and an entourage of divine warriors in scarlet sky ships visited their people a few decades past. She came with gifts of techno-magic and large hounds in exchange for samples of blood and the answering of many questions. She and her attendants stayed a month, travelling the land and performing great deeds of power. She encouraged the Southern Tribes to secure their frozen domain and grow strong, for a great war was coming.



Bloodreavers of Ath

Southern priests and priestesses of Ath are known as bloodreavers. They are renowned for ritualistically covering themselves in blood and performing sacrificial offerings to the goddess of war. Blood is seen as the soul, essence and power of a person, and is used by priests to bless locations, items and warriors. Large sacrificial events involve alters of stone and metal, fire and hundreds of victims. Most are prisoners of war, but some are willing participants. These volunteers – often the elderly or gravely ill – see their sacrifice as a final, noble contribution to their tribe and the legacy of their families.

Other Gods

The Southern Tribes acknowledge all Eternal gods, though they see their relationship as purely transactional. Gods are worshipped because they are powerful, their favour is to be won and their wrath to be bought off.

Weak gods receive almost no attention; such as Akh, the Arcane Wielders, Etso, Fik and Ugra'thok. While the powerful, feared and useful gods receive nearly all of their cultural attention; such as Ath, Corp, Dos, Dray and Nix.

Northern Raids

The Tribes dominate a vast tundral region from the Gale Sea to the Sea of Fog. There is more than enough ore, lumber, fish and migrational herds for their sparse population to thrive, if it were not for the many monsters and their divine mandate from Ath to grow strong.

As masters of longships and iron craft, they dominate the Sea of Signs and regularly raid the Kingdom of Ire and the Panos Theocracy. Stealing away riches and thralls (slaves) so that most Legion can pursue lives as warriors, hunters and explorers. Thralls roam free of chains, as they know ice and death await them if they flee.

Threats

The Southern Tribes have risen and fallen many times throughout their history as they are perpetually called to navigate the dual threats of peace and conflict. Peace has always resulted in complacency, and weakness, while war has forged stronger rivals.

Dragon Psychrosis

The tyrant of the south, Psychrosis was forced from his ancient roost by the Southern Legion Tribes whom it sought to enslave following the Druidic War. Psychrosis has a thin body and large wings that give him unparalleled speed. His freezing breath can entomb ships and create snow storms. The dragon king roosts to the west, and he regularly sends out his white and grey-scaled Dracim to raid Legion villages.

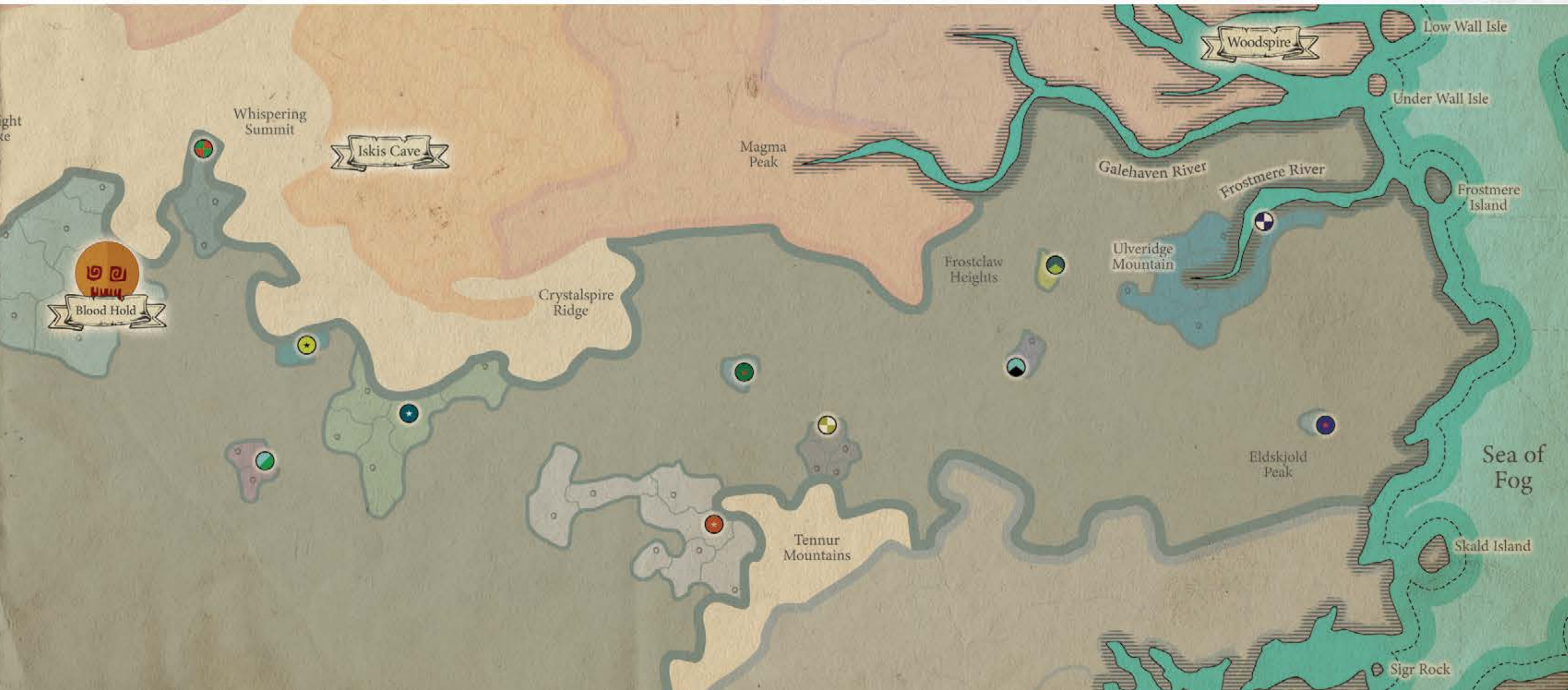
Jötnar & Trolls

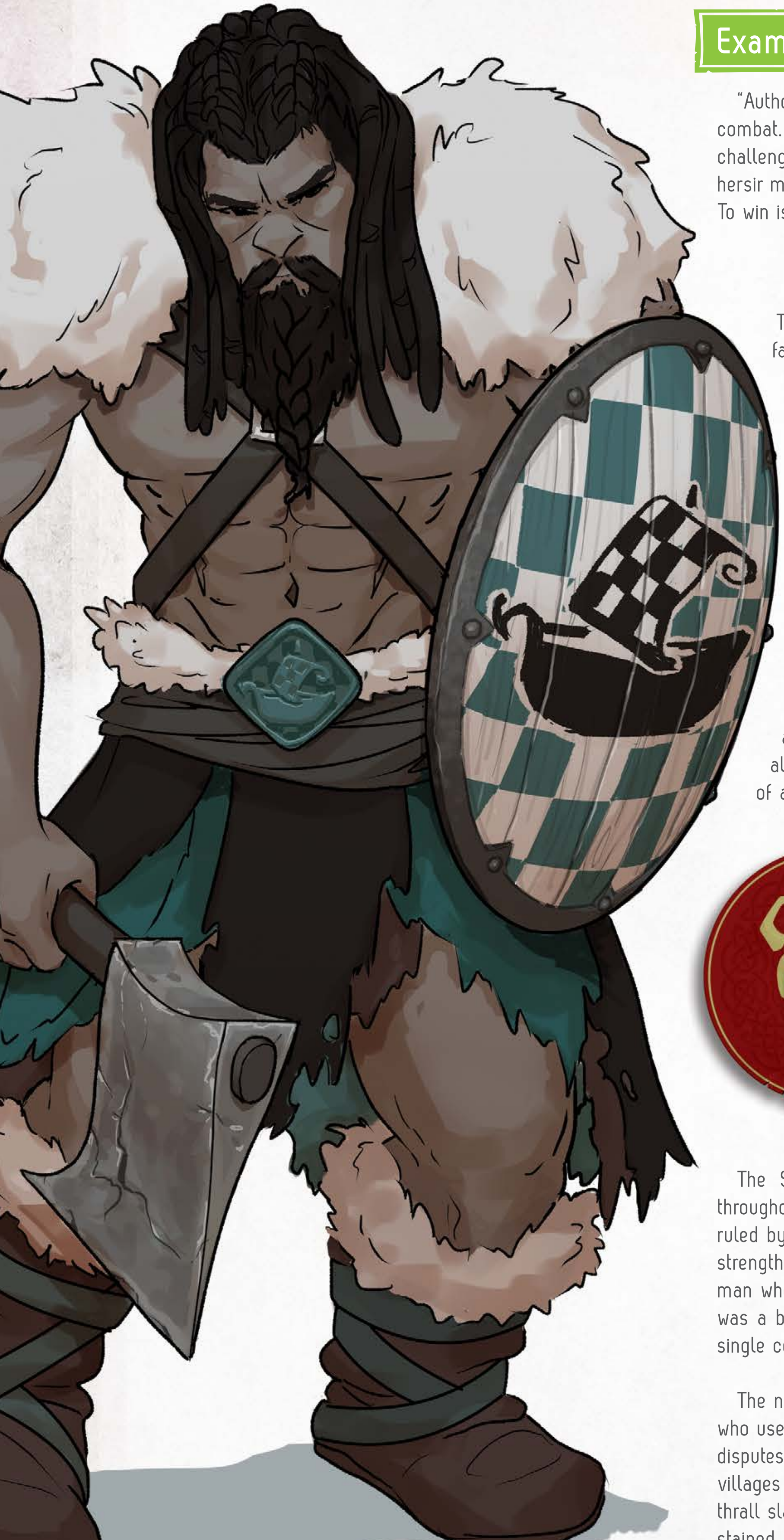
Frost Trolls are common throughout the White Expanse and compete with the Southern Tribes for resources. They live to the deep south and are allied with the towering Jötnar. The Giants are few, but they are nearly impossible to defend against as their prophetic dreams give them near-immunity to ambushes and counter-attacks.

Kingdom of Ire

The fledgling Kingdom of Ire is to yet secure their southern borders against Tribal raids as they are focused on far greater threats and opportunities. The Southern Tribes dominate the Sea of Signs and prefer to raid the duchy or House Rubis as they fear the kingdom's demigod ruler. If Ire constructs a navy and secures their south-eastern Ice Wall they may prompt the Tribes to redirect their forces against the Holy Kingdom of Catla.

Ire has never struck at the Southern Tribes with an army, but small forces of skilled warriors have been known to cause considerable trouble.





Legion sea slither raider.

Example Tribes

"Authority to rule is no birthright, it is earned and taken through combat. Any free karl may challenge their bondi, any bondi may challenge their thane, any thane may challenge their hersir, any hersir may challenge their jarl, any jarl may challenge the high-jarl. To win is to take power, to fail is to lose status or die."

– Leif Fireheart,
Bloodreaver of Ath.

The Southern Tribes are a confederation of dozens of Legion factions who are loosely bound together for mutual survival and shared ambition. A tribe may be a single village, a collection of townships or a large nomadic family. For the past century, they have been ruled by the Blood Horns, the largest of the tribes.

Communication and organisation between the tribes is fraught with challenges. Vast distances, treacherous terrain, and simmering rivalries between the larger tribes often make unity a tenuous achievement. Yet under the guidance of the goddess Ath and the Blood Horns, the Southern Tribes have reached an unprecedented height of power and prosperity. While outright civil war is unlikely in the near future, the Jarls know all too well that peace among the tribes is fragile and temporary – each frostbitten alliance merely a pause before the next inevitable clash of ambitions.

Blood Horns

- **Ruler:** High-Jarl Eirik Bloodmane: Lord of Ice and Blood (Legion).
- **Capital:** God's Fang.
- **Subject Species:** Primarily Legion.
- **Cultural Notes:**
  - Many sacrifices to Ath.
- **Legal Notes:**
  - Rule the Southern Tribes.
  - Extensive use of oaths.
- **Economic Strengths:** Raids.

The Southern Tribes have fractured and unified many times throughout their long history. For the past century, they have been ruled by the Blood Horns, a large tribe renowned for their physical strength and devotion to Ath. High-jarl Eirik Bloodmane is a massive man who sits upon an imposing throne of blood encased in ice. He was a bloodreaver of Ath before he killed ten rivals in a string of single combats to secure his position.

The noble thanes of the tribe are skilled warriors and lawmakers who use an array of oaths and blood pacts to secure loyalty, settle disputes and ensure justice for their people. Blood Horn towns and villages are peaceful, prosperous, well-guarded and overflowing with thrall slaves. At the centre of every settlement is an altar of stone, stained red with the blood of hundreds or thousands of sacrificed victims to the goddess Ath.

Hoggva

- **Ruler:** Jarl Helga Highaxe, Gloom Knight (Legion).
- **Capital:** Hefndborg.
- **Subject Species:** Primarily Legion.
- **Cultural Notes:**
  - Culturally eclectic.
  - Many Dracim thrall slaves.
- **Legal Notes:**
  - At war with the dragon Psychrosis.
- **Economic Strengths:** Lumber.

Once a struggling minor tribe on the brink of collapse, the fortunes of the Hoggva were transformed when the Radiant Knight, Helga Highaxe, betrayed her house and goddess to join them. Corrupted by the sinister whispers of the dark god Dos, Helga abandoned her oaths, commandeering a ship from the Kingdom of Ire to journey to the White Expanse and embrace the path of a Gloom Knight. There, she found purpose among the Hoggva, aiding them in their relentless war against the draconic minions of the fearsome dragon Psychrosis.

Under Helga's leadership, the faltering tribe has thrived – absorbing dozens of minor tribes and driving back the dragon's forces. Helga dreams of slaying the great dragon king and one day returning to her homeland to exact revenge on those who betrayed her.

Sea Slither

- **Ruler:** Jarl Skadi Upsail (Legion).
- **Capital:** Stormvígr.
- **Subject Species:** Primarily Legion.
- **Cultural Notes:**
  - Many ships.
  - Venerate both Ath and Corp.
  - Incredibly superstitious.
- **Economic Strengths:**
  - Boat building, fish, raids.

The Sea Slither tribe are feared across coastlines and rivers alike for their unexpected raids. Masters of surprise, they command thousands of longships with shallow hulls that can navigate far upriver, striking settlements thought beyond reach. Known for their ruthlessness and speed, the Sea Slither will target anyone – whether it's isolated villages, the distant colonies of the Holy Kingdom of Catla, or even the formidable Giants of Tilward. Their hit-and-run tactics leave little time for organized resistance, ensuring they remain a constant threat to the unprepared.

Equally loyal to both Corp and Ath, the Sea Slithers prefer to perform their sacrificial rituals on the open sea during the calm of mid-day with the moon faintly peaking above the horizon. The tribe is incredibly superstitious and will go to great lengths to seek the blessing of both goddesses before and after every endeavour.

Troll Rippers

- **Ruler:** Jarl Hjaldan Wrest (Legion).
- **Capital:** Blood Hold.
- **Subject Species:** Primarily Legion.
- **Cultural Notes:**
  - Love of deception.
  - No tribal allies.
  - Venerate Nix above Ath.
- **Economic Strengths:**
  - Hunted game.

The Troll Rippers distinguish themselves from other tribes through their peculiar customs and reverence for deception. Hunting Frost Trolls serves as their rite of passage, they honor the goddess Nix above Ath and celebrate elaborate deceits – even when directed at family and allies. Among the Troll Rippers, to take offense at being deceived is to reveal weakness of mind. Unsurprisingly, they have no allies beyond their own tribe and are always viewed with suspicion by outsiders.

Troll Rippers are unlike most Legion, as they are skilled at stealth, archery, traps and battlefield misdirection. If forced to face a Ripper in combat, the wisest course is to engage them on open ground, denying them the chance to prepare.

Vargin

- **Ruler:** Jarl Hrolf Icefang (Legion).
- **Capital:** Úlfr's Keep.
- **Subject Species:** Primarily Legion.
- **Cultural Notes:**
  - Breed and train holy Cerbion Hounds for hunting and war.
  - Small population.
  - Some claim divine ancestry.
- **Economic Strengths:**
  - Hunting (game meat and fur).

As a relatively new tribe, Vargin has been quick to distinguish themselves as skilled hunters who have been blessed by Ath herself to raise her holy Cerbion Hounds. When the goddess descended upon the Southern Tribes in person, she brought a host of divine Legion warriors clad in resplendent red armour and with packs of massive dogs who flourished in the White Expanse's cold climate.

After Ath's return to the heavens, it was discovered that many hounds remained behind, along with a number of minor divine techno-magical relics. Additionally, several women claimed to have conceived children by her attendants. With the blessing of the high-jarl, a conclave of bloodreavers set apart these hounds, relics, and blessed families to form a new tribe: the Vargin. Though small, they are determined to prove themselves worthy of their extraordinary origin.

Jötnar Giants

- **Ruler:** Slumbering King.
- **Cultural Notes:**
  - Allied with Frost Trolls.
  - Guided by their dreams.
  - Very few in number.

When the lightning strikes and the iron chills.
When the mountains move and your dreams whisper.

Run home, child, run home.

When you hear their roar and feel the earth.
When their icy grip tears your roof, wood from stone.

The Jötnar has come to take you home.
– Southern Tribe children's rhyme.

The Jötnar of the frozen south are a fearsome, tall and sinewy breed of Giant. They tower over the sprawling tundras and form dark silhouettes against skies that flash with snow and sleet. Bristling hair fans out across their arms and upper bodies, staving off the worst of the cold; blunt horns and spines adorn their thick, armoured hides that are tinted grey and dull white.

They are the largest of the Giants, growing to almost four times the height of their cousins in the north and west. Each requires a mammoth amount of food to sustain their bulk and they must hibernate for most of the year to stave off hunger. When first aroused from their dream-filled sleep they commonly move to the coasts to fish, spear great ocean beasts and raid Legion towns.

Vision-Filled Dreams

As with all Giants, they delight in the fear and pain of smaller creatures. But rather than a murderous rampage, Jötnar attacks are well-organised and perfectly timed. Guided by visions within their dreams, they have become wiser than other Giants, but no less cruel. They pillage for food and thrill, ignoring wealth, useless baubles, and take few prisoners.

Mysticism and warfare are one and the same for the Jötnar. As they slumber they experience visions of combat and hear commands of where and when to attack. If they follow these enigmatic directions they nearly always succeed, no matter the power of their prey. The Eternal priests suspect Nix or Fik to be behind these dreams, while Ta'Di soothsayers believe ancestral spirits are preventing their people's extinction. The Jötnar believe these holy visions to come from the spirit of the god Ugra'thok.

Slumbering King

In the deep south of the desolate White Expanse, a slumbering Jötnar king of old rests in a cursed sleep beneath the earth. As he dreams, the chilling whispers that escape his lips echo with eerie foresight, weaving cryptic prophecies and revelations. The Jötnar who tend to him and write down his words live in fear of their tyrants awakening, as he has uttered plans to bring about the end of all Giants.

Lost Power & an Uneasy Alliance

The Jötnar were once far more numerous. During the primal Age of Darkness and most of the Age of Illumination they ruled the White Expanse unchallenged. They were treated as lords, and the Legion and Trolls who wanted to share the tundras did so at their mercy, paying tributes of food, materials and slaves.

Before the end of the Druidic War the Jötnar were already in decline to the rising Southern Legion Tribes. The druids of Neph had forced them to spend the lives of their largest warriors, and a string of Legion jarls forced them out. The Jötnar abandoned their ancient mountain homes and moved into the deep south and underground. It was also during this time that they learned to hibernate to prevent starvation, and also when they began to dream visions.

In need of aid, the Jötnar begrudging allied with Frost Trolls who had also been displaced by the Legion. Many resent this alliance as the trolls were once their subjects and are a potential readily available food source.

Jötnar villages are often small and hidden in mountains and valleys with caves for hibernation. They can settle in place for years, but will immediately move if a single member awakens with a vision to do so. These abandoned homes feel haunted and are filled with objects of remarkable craftsmanship – fists, obelisks and arches, all carved from pearly ice and crusted with polished stones. Their purpose is unknown, but appear to be some kind of shrine to the god Ugra'thok or great spirits of the land.

Despite their strength and visions, the Jötnar are few in number. They can live for hundreds of years, but bear few children. Best estimates say that under a dozen small tribes remain.

Doijn Storm

Long ago before the Druidic War, Doijn, one of the Great Dragon Kings, slumbered in a large sealed-off cavern under a mountain. A group of Jötnar and their Troll servants ventured into his den and slew the sleeping beast in cowardly fashion. Angering the goddess Nix, Doijn became a wraith who summons forth a gigantic and endless snowstorm that drifts across the barren tundra. The storm gives the vague impression of broad, sweeping wings, and tendrils that sweep down like claws to the ground.

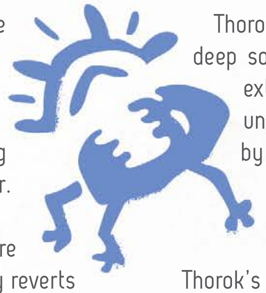
As the ghostly Doijn drifts across the White Expanse, he leaves behind strange apparitions. Most of the time, these are little more than shadows, barely disturbing the snow at their feet. But during blizzards, they coalesce into Frost Wraiths. The Jötnar make regular use of this storm to hide their migrations and largest raiding parties.

Frost Trolls

- **Ruler:** Thorok the Ever-King (Troll).
- **Capital:** Gogflat.
- **Cultural Notes:**
  - Allied with Jötnar Giants.
  - Cannibals – absorbing the toughts of Trolls and Kaltorans that they eat.
  - Nomadic for most of the year. Live underground (in a Hoodrick) during the coldest months.
  - Worship the god Ugra'Jop.

> "Those Frost Trolls – ugly grey and blue beasts, like walking glaciers with twisted faces and ice-crusted fur."
>
> – Unknown Legion hunter.

Scattered throughout the south and attop some rare mountains, live a many short and pudgy monsters with blackened teeth. Wrapped thickly in furs and leathers, they sneer from behind scarred cheeks and large tusked mouths. These creatures are vicious warriors, keen-eyed and tactical. They fight to the bitter end, whipped into a frenzy by the sight of a single dead comrade, and will happily kill and eat anyone who wanders through their lands.



These are the Frost Trolls. Like all Trolls, they are cannibals, with a very special 'talent' – by eating the bodies of other Trolls, they gain some of their memories, skills and personality. Other creatures are stupid, they reason, in eating too many dumb animals they are dulling their minds and preventing themselves from living forever.

They never catch on to the truth that other species are different in this matter for long. As eating their kin quickly reverts them back to their entrenched ways of thinking.

The Frost Trolls are a disparate people, wandering the White Expanse in nomadic family groups. They have a pastoral lifestyle, grazing domestic Thud Cows on tundra weeds. These beasts are incredibly hardy, and can survive on little; they provide the Trolls with food, milk, leather and fur. Groups of Frost Trolls can be small as a dozen, or thousands strong, but they never go it alone. Family and tribe have a deep cultural significance, safeguarding memories and skills passed down from one generation to the next.

Hoodricks

Each Frost Troll commonly belongs to one of nine ancestral liniages that are known as a Hoodrick, each with strict rules of interbreeding and interconsumption. Each has carved out its own underground city within roomy caves where they may gather during the coldest months, sheltering with their herds and the occassional giant Jötnar ally. Over time, the Trolls of each Hoodrick have developed markedly different appearances, such as foot-long noses, an extra head of height or bulging facial hair. Rather than the sallow green of other Trolls, their skin may be greyish-red, blue, white or pale turquoise, depending on which Hoodrick they belong to. All are ugly.

Thorok, the Ever-King

The leader of the Frost Trolls is Thorok, an Immortal known as the Ever-King. He has lived a hundred lifetimes across many bodies, his personality and memories so strong that they totally take over each Troll chosen to consume him. He is a charismatic leader, loved and revered by all Hoodricks, despite his fickle cruelty and violent purges. Centuries of accumulated experience and absorbed memories make him an unnaturally skilled strategist, cunning and analytical. He rarely keeps a body more than a decade. When he grows tired of his current form, before signs of ageing or due to a battle wound, he calls for a successor, beginning a deadly trial of strength that young males compete in for the privilege of being his next host.

Not long after the Druidic War, Thorok was killed on the battlefield by the Southern Legion Tribes, where confusion and betrayal led to three Trolls eating different parts of his body. All were taken over by the mind of Thorok and a brutal civil war ensured as they refused to tollerate the existance of each other. In the bloody aftermath, the Legion Tribes had consolidated their positions and the Frost Trolls have never regained their old power.

Thorok lives a nomadic lifestyle, but commonly returns to the deep south near the Kingdom of Romanos, beyond the furthest extent of Legion Tribe's raids. His capital city of **Gorgflat** lies under a ring-shaped plateau, built of stone and ice, raised by the Jötnar but long abandoned. Well-defended by its walls and many caves, the city is filled with the smell of rotting meat and the Frost Trolls' few cultural treasures.

Thorok's elite guard is a group known as the **Blood Callers**, after the red **Song Steel** metal of their weapons. Trolls have little skill with metallurgy; the steel of their tools is forged by the distant Twi-Far smiths from Drasong Clan, who trade with the Jötnar, who in-turn sell to the Trolls in exchange for loyalty and the best of their Thud Cows herds to eat. There are sixteen **Blood Callers**, and once every sixteen years, the strongest and most loyal is chosen to be eaten by Thorok, adding their mettle and guile to him. It is the highest honour to become part of the Ever-King.

A Strange Traveller

Stories abound of a lonely blue Frost Troll far from the White Expanse, bent lance in hand, wandering the mountains around the Blood Stone Desert and the Kingdom of Ire in search of adventure and worthy foes to slay. He seems convinced that the ancient stag he rides is a noble steed, his ill-fitting plate armour is a glory to behold and that he is a Kaltoran Knight and not a Troll at all.

He is regularly bewildered as he is constantly thrown out of taverns and chased away from villages wielding pitchforks and torches, where he simply wishes to enjoy a good meal and gain directions towards a suitable monster to slay and damsels to rescue from distress. The truth is, this unfortunate soul was once a young, idealistic Kaltoran who was killed and eaten by a Frost Troll.

Religion & Arcane

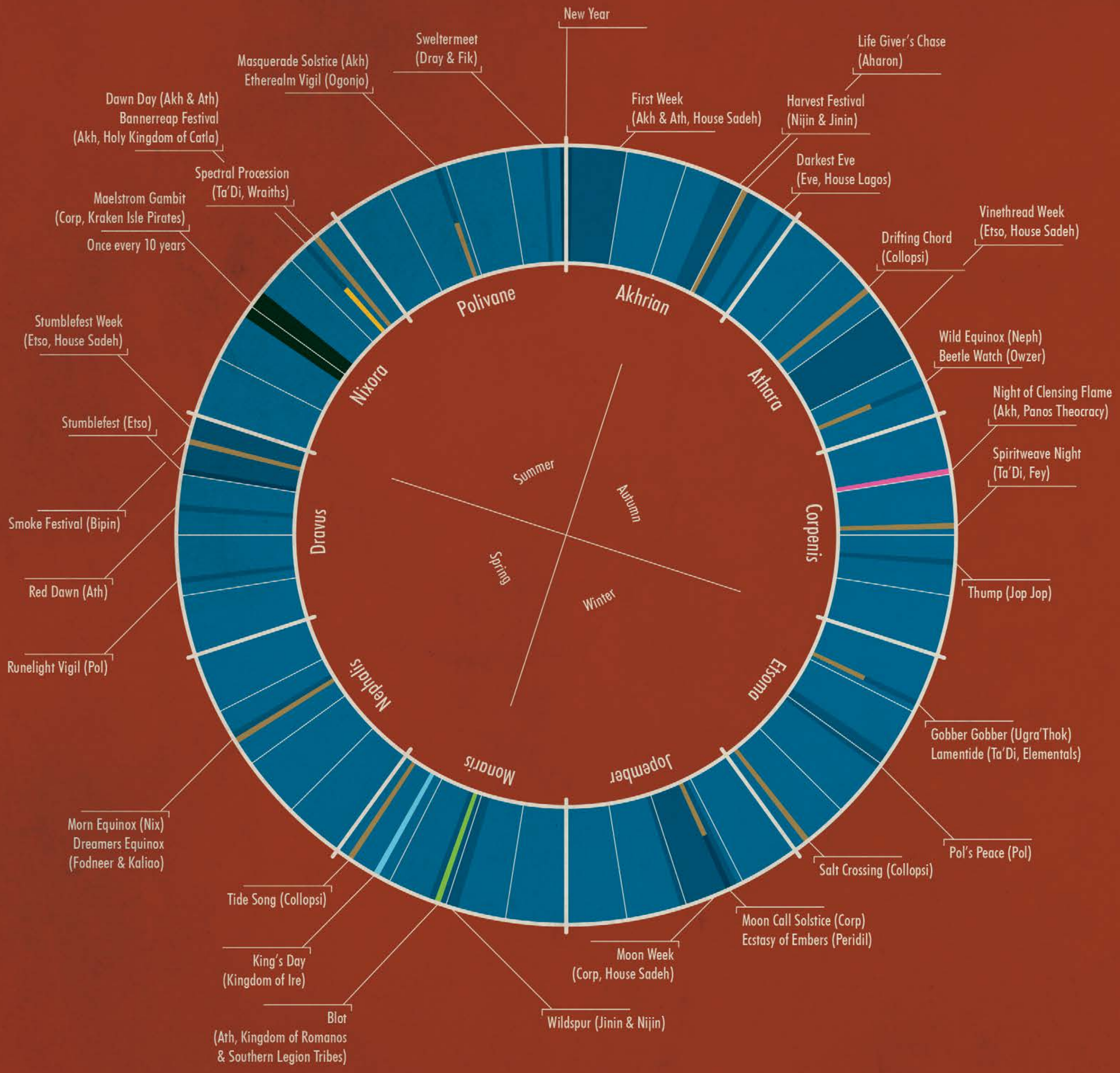
Daru felt the magic flow from his fingertips, spilling outwards, fuelling the glimmering polygon that drifted before the Remnant enchanter's eyes. With a flick of his wrist, Daru shattered his creation and sent that power cascading outwards. The burned clearing was bathed in emerald light, draped in a wrestment of time itself that summoned an illusion of the past.

Daru let his arms drop, chest heaving. Ghostly images rose from the ground, replaying a silent scene of chaos and destruction from only a few days prior, and the Remnant watched grimly as Drasong Clan bandits set upon a caravan of merchants who'd camped for the night. Steel flashed, enchantments gleamed, and searing bursts of energy tore into the woodlands, igniting the dry leaves and leaving deep ashen furrows in the ground.

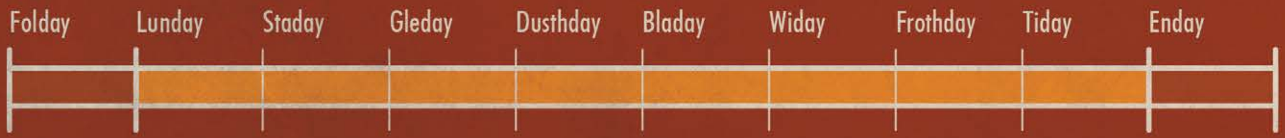
This was what the All-Being wished him to see, Daru knew. A vision from the one true god had led him here, and despite the scoffing of his travelling companions, his faith had been rewarded. This had been the pattern even since Daru was only a headstrong youth; dreams sent from the All-Being, often confusing and unwanted. How many times had he scoffed at himself, downplaying the dreams as flights of foolish fantasy? How long had he wallowed in stubbornness before his faith had matured into full trust?

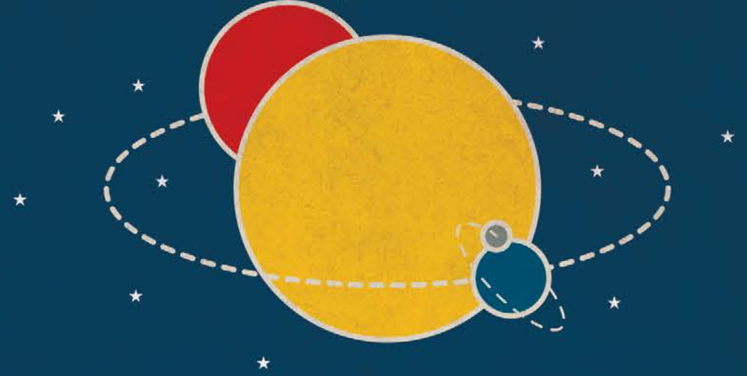
Even with this revelation, his cosmopolitan travelling companions would not understand. They had been shaped by their own cultures, the visions from their gods of an entirely different ilk. Their manufactured deities announced themselves like striking thunder, demanding worship, doling out glittering gifts to followers and fiery punishment upon their foes. The All-Being's voice was far softer, a whisper from places one would never expect. Where there was doubt… only then could belief be an act of faith.

Thoughts still swirling, Daru turned from the clearing and back towards their camp. He was not to know all things; not in this life. And yet, in his own faith, he felt all the stronger.

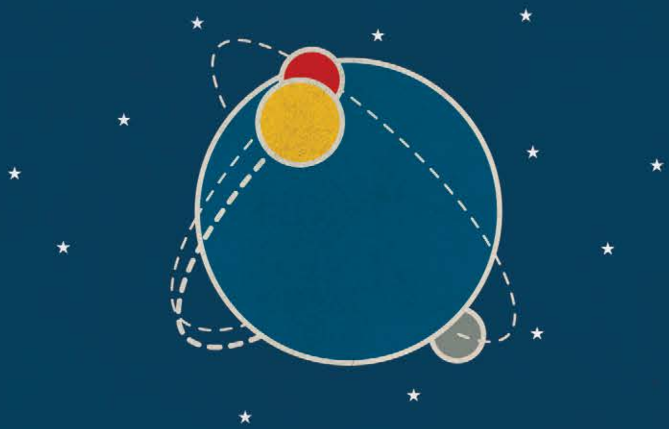

New Year
First Week
(Akh & Ath, House Sadeh)
Life Giver's Chase
(Aharon)
Harvest Festival
(Nijin & Jinin)
Darkest Eve
(Eve, House Lagos)
Drifting Chord
(Collopsi)
Vinethread Week
(Etso, House Sadeh)
Wild Equinox (Neph)
Beetle Watch (Owzer)
Night of Clensing Flame
(Akh, Panos Theocracy)
Spiritweave Night
(Ta'Di, Fey)
Thump (Jop Jop)
Gobber Gobber (Ugra'Thok)
Lamentide (Ta'Di, Elementals)
Pol's Peace (Pol)
Salt Crossing (Collopsi)
Moon Call Solstice (Corp)
Ecstasy of Embers (Peridil)
Moon Week
(Corp, House Sadeh)
Wildspur (Jinin & Nijin)
Blot
(Ath, Kingdom of Romanos
& Southern Legion Tribes)
King's Day
(Kingdom of Ire)
Tide Song (Collopsi)
Morn Equinox (Nix)
Dreamers Equinox
(Fodneer & Kaliao)
Runelight Vigil (Pol)
Red Dawn (Ath)
Smoke Festival (Bipin)
Stumblefest (Etso)
Stumblefest Week
(Etso, House Sadeh)
Once every 10 years
Maelstrom Gambit
(Corp, Kraken Isle Pirates)
Spectral Procession
(Ta'Di, Wraiths)
Dawn Day (Akh & Ath)
Bannerreap Festival
(Akh, Holy Kingdom of Catla)
Masquerade Solstice (Akh)
Etherealm Vigil (Ogonjo)
Sweltermeet
(Dray & Fik)
Akhrian
Athara
Corpenis
Etsoma
Jopember
Monaris
Nephalis
Dravus
Nixora
Polivane
Summer
Autumn
Winter
Spring

10 Months per Year
4 Weeks per Month
10 Days per Week

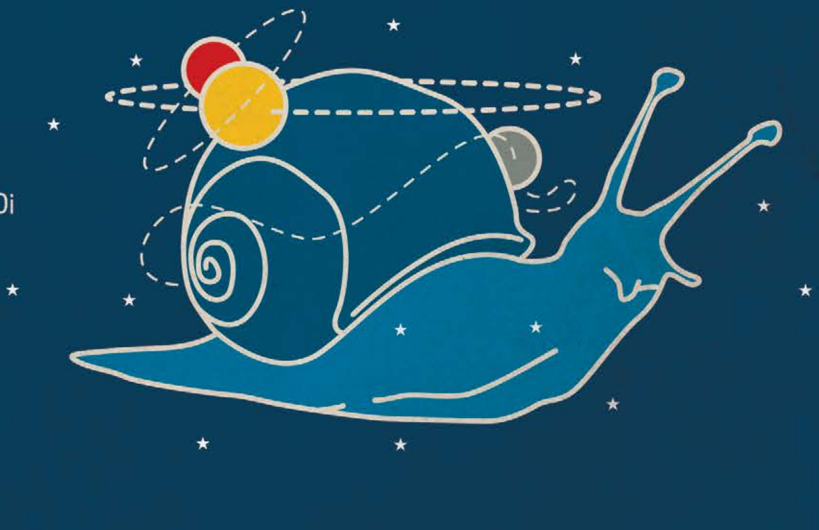

Folday
Lunday
Staday
Gleday
Dusthday
Bladay
Widay
Frothday
Tiday
Enday



All-Faith



Eternal &
Reformed Ta'Di



Traditional Ta'Di

All-Faith & the All-Being

- **Domains of Influence:**
  - All things good (truth, love, wisdom, holy, light, creation…).
- **Divine Servants:** None.
- **Favoured Creations:** All living intelligent species.
- **Iconography:** Circle, spheres.
- **Weapons:** Magic (All-Power), martial arts.

- **Common forms of Follower Worship:**
  - Acts of charity, meditation, obedience, prayer, repentance, signing, study holy books.
- **Common Follower Items:**
  - Hammer weapons with 'Ability and Shield' modifications.
  - Outfits with Innate keyword.
  - Focus and healing potion utilities.
- **Common Follower Magic:**
  - Those connected to luck, protection, healing and wisdom.

"The All-Being almost never grants us what we ask for, but he always gives us what we need. We may seek comfort but receive strength, ask for answers and find character. Trust that his gifts, though unexpected, are always the right ones."

– Book of Wandering,
Chapter IV, verse CXXXIV.

The monotheistic All-Faith was primarily a Remnant religion during the Age of Darkness and early Age of Illumination. In the Kingdom of Ire it has become particularly diverse, drawing followers from all species and walks of life, though especially from the impoverished. In the Holy Kingdom of Catla it is a popular underground faith among Creet and Dracim slaves.

The ancient Empire of Catla was particularly harsh on followers of the All-Being god as they rejected the Eternal gods and saw all people as equal in value. The Empire drove them out to live on the edges of the dangerous Whispering Jungle in the far north. Suspicions of its All-Monk leaders only grew after it became known that the infamous Archdruid came from their ranks.

The All-Faith encourages their adherents to live lives in contentment under the provision of the All-Being and to pursue truth, love, respect, humility, putting off of self-interest and trust in the All-Being. Due to a history of persecution and living as a minority religion, those who follow the All-Being tend to have strong convictions that give them courage and hope. This is especially true for those who have witnessed the wonders of All-Power magic and the benefits of All-Faith teachings.

Many see the All-Monks as stubborn and closed-minded, as they refuse to accept the Eternal gods as divine and place their religion over every mortal authority. They speak without doubt that their god is not only the one true god, but that he is perfect, without flaw and absolute in his authority and power. His will can not be thwarted, and all actions – be they good or evil – will have outcomes that are in accordance to his perfect plan.

All-Embodiment & the All-Tomes

All-Faith holy books say that the All-Being raised ancient Remnant from the dead to bring about a divine kingdom, but many of those Remnant rejected the All-Being's love. The All-Being opened his arms up to all species, promising to adopt those who would put their faith in him.

It is rare for a person to be raised from the dead by All-Power, and those who are, always feel a wordless voice in their mind that lets them know they are cared for by the All-Being, and that they should seek out wisdom within his All-Tomes. What is understood of the All-Being has been largely shaped by ancient followers of a teacher known as the **All-Embodiment** who lived during the Age of Darkness. While there are numerous divergent theological traditions within the All-Faith, all of those that see the All-Being as the one true deity follow a collection of sacred texts that are known as the All-Tomes.

The All-Tomes are holy texts written by the All-Embodiment's disciples during and after his ministry, and form the philosophical foundations of the All-Faith religion. Including their understanding of justice, government, liberty, personal duty and All-Power. There are seven canonical All-Tomes, a further collection of highly regarded martial books and three with disputed content.

Book of Rings (One)
Known for its repeated use of ring analogies and metaphors, this is considered to be the most important of the All-Tomes as it is the only one to be written by the All-Embodiment himself. It puts forth direct calls for all people to place their trust in the All-Being, and to live lives that circle around 'Truth and Love' and not 'Laws or Self'.

Book of Wandering (Two)
A collection of wisdoms, sayings, parables and songs that apply to both everyday life and grand ideas. This book famously ends with a lamentation by an All-Monk about the Remnant's terrible past in a great war against Neph, and how the All-Being chose the worst of people – traitors who died through hubris – to be the seed of his new holy kingdom.

Book of the Three (Three)
A series of conversations between three All-Monks and the All-Embodiment about the will of the All-Being, prophecy and how the followers of the All-Being will suffer for their faith.

Book of Stones (Four)
Named after a holy stone that was used by the All-Embodiment to save a village called Rima Peak. This book is a large and meandering guide to civic duty, order, peace and a warning against chaos.

Book of Fire (Five)
An intense book that warns against civic and personal stagnation, rot, legalism and the dangers of too many rules. It is

seen as a counterbalance to the Book of Stones that is designed to foster a shifting equilibrium between the cosmic tensions of 'stability and disruption'.

Book of Enlightenment (Six)
A large historical documentation of the All-Embodiment's ministry to the early Remnant in a desert. It starts near a village named High Matombo, and is focused on his journey and how various Remnant responded to his disciples and their teachings.

The All-Monk Panashe Kutenda who authored this book has a supplementary entry that she wrote near her death long after the All-Embodiment had passed on. Sometimes referred to as the Scroll of Peace, as it talks about her inner peace as she approaches death.

Book of Letters (Seven)
A collection of correspondence between the All-Embodiment and various struggling villages and All-Monks who were not travelling with him. Most of these letters are a mixture of moral and theological corrections, along with a substantial amount of encouragement to hold to their faith in the All-Being's care. This book also contains instructions on the use of All-Power.

Books of Arms (Eight, Noncanonical)
An ever-evolving collection of martial guides that have been regularly added to by both All-Monks and skilled non-All-Power warriors. They rarely contain theology, but are much sought after by warriors outside the faith due to their wisdom.

Book of Temperance (Nine, Controversial)
A non-authoritative book that encourages self-control, the blessings of poverty, and encouragement to give yourself over to works of charity and egalitarianism. The authorship of this book is in question, and it is seen as being at odds with the Books of Stone and Fire.

Book of Death (Ten, Controversial)
Fragments of a book that was written by a questioning resurrected All-Monk disciple of the All-Embodiment who was a scholar and had done much evil in his past life. Most of the book is missing, but it famously ends with a bold declaration that the appearance of the All-Being is quite possibly the most significant event in all of history if he truly is the one and only god.

Book of Midnight (Elevn, Controversial)
A hated text by the All-Faith that encourages personal wealth so that one may do more good, and that it was Neph who resurrected the early Remnant from the dead. This is a heretical book that turned a promising All-Monk into the demigod Archdruid (pg: 122) that destroyed the great Empire of Catla.

Alternative Perspectives

The All-Faith is particularly despised within the Holy Kingdom of Catla as it is seen as a slave religion and played a role in the rise of the Archdruid who destroyed their Empire. It is outlawed and has many factions, each with its own theological distinctives. Most are revolutionary in nature, and see the All-Being as a path towards their liberation from servitude. The oldest factions are accepting of their role as slaves, and seek to win over their own masters through kindness and the quality of their character.

Likewise, the All-Faith is outlawed within the Panos Theocracy as they see the All-Being as a alien god not made for Akharon.

Eternal priests are open to the idea of new and unknown gods, but as the All-Faith places their deity outside their mythos as the one true god, they cannot accept their teachings as presented. Many Eternal priests treat the All-Being as just another god, albeit one who is peculiarly isolated from other gods and obviously misunderstood by his own followers. They are seeking to weave a story that ties him into their pantheon, possibly as a god of 'sacrafice, healing and lost causes'.

Traditional Ta-Di seers and soothsayers do not have a widely shared understanding of the All-Faith religion as it is relatively new to them. Their simple answer is to see the All-Being as yet another Great Spirit with a peculiar personality. Many seers and soothsayers are hopeful to find common ground with the All-Faith, as they both share an appreciation for harmony, inner growth and peace.

There exists within the All-Faith many factions between regions as there is no unified hierarchical system. This is not seen as a failing by most followers, as within this disorganised mess of a religion the All-Being continues to guide all things and he does not need his followers to have earthly power, purity of doctrine, prosperity, strength or a large mass followers. A single isolated worshiper in poverty is enough. In all things, the All-Being's perfect plan is in motion.

Most factions are small and localised to a specific region or ethnic group. Many are formed around specific All-Monk teachers and tend to take on aspects of their personality. Some are pacificist to the point of death, many are well-known for their charity and others actively seek out monsters to slay. All are missionary minded, but each has its own distinctive approach.

> "The gods are relatable as they share our vices, virtues and physicality. While this ephemeral All-Being is, alien, distant and not of this world... just like Dos."
> – Unknown Eternal Priest.

Eternal Priesthood

» See History write-up from pg: 61.

"Mon has crafted countless worlds and their governing pantheons. Each is unique and began their existence as a swirl of primordial energy and unrealized potential.

Do not think of Akharon as dead earth and gods as frozen myths. All are alive and growing. Both Akharon and her gods are not as they once were and will not remain as they now are. Everything changes, just as it was designed to do."

– Deacon Tulan Highmoon,
Lecturing on the Nature of Change.

The Eternal gods walked freely upon Akharon's surface at the dawn of the Age of Illumination. This was a time of unbridled innovation when world-defining legends were forged and civilisation took their first steps in the holy presence of the divine. Though these days have fallen into myth and shadow, imprints remain throughout the land and within all cultures – both civilised and monstrous. The isolated Kingdom of Apollonios was especially replete with art, stories, mysterious metal artefacts and ruins of grand cities. When they merged with the growing Empire of Catla they coalesced countless disparate threads into what is now known as the Eternal Priesthood.

As Catla became a mighty empire, it carried its religion throughout the continent, adapting gods from conquered lands and giving them new meaning… which often resulted in sanding off their more 'barbaric' edges. At the Empire's peak, its pantheon was firmly established, with Akh – god of the Yellow Sun – its leader, with House Catla as his divine voice. To the Priesthood, their religion was not taken from other cultures; rather, they were discovering more about the divine as they studied more ruins, artefacts and lost records from the Age of Illumination.

Although it is now rare for the gods to openly walk upon the earth, they remain a constant presence for the people of Akharon. Far from detached beings of spirit, the Eternal gods are known and worshipped for plainly showing themselves in the sky, leaving their physical marks upon the world and their many colourful traits displayed across countless thrilling legends. Akh's loyalty and heroism; Fik's quiet power; Dray's boundless passion; the gods are as diverse as the ways in which they are worshipped. While a burnt offering may invite Akh's blessing of protection, Ath is more likely to grant success in battle to a warrior who recites an epic poem in her honour. Etso is said to smile upon feasts where emotions are laid bare, while a coin donation to the temple treasury in the secrecy of night may assuage Corp's capricious fickle wrath for a long sea voyage.

» **Acolyte:** Priest/priestess in training.
» **Priest/Priestess:** Trained religious leader.
» **Deacon:** Leader of a large temple.
» **High Priest/Priestess:** Spokesperson for a specific god within a country or large region.
» **Sovereign:** Leader of all temples within a country.

Artefacts & Magic

Over centuries many divine artefacts have been claimed by the Priesthood, contributing greatly to their vast understanding of magic. Key to their priestly duties is the relentless pursuit of any artefacts that were abandoned after the gods' ascension, or cast down to the mortal realm for reasons unknown. Most of these grand items are forged from magical metal, capable of fantastical feats and extremely dangerous in untrained hands. Once, it was the sacred role of priests to repair and understand divine artefacts, which also allowed them to restrict knowledge to only a select few. Techno-mages now dominate this field with new creations, leading to a bitter rivalry between the two powerful factions. Traditional priestly magic is known as Alchemy, as it makes extensive use of potions.

Displayed in a place of prominence, 'keystone' artefacts are an ironclad mainstay of all Eternal temples, chosen to be visually impressive and easily identifiable with their divine patron. While dangerous items are stored in the temple's sub-levels where they are carefully guarded and analyzed by divine scholars.

Dead, New & Unkown Gods

To the Priesthood the Eternal pantheon is fluid, occasionally gaining and losing deities over time. Most prominently with the deaths of Mon, Pol and Neph, the addition of Dos, and the birth of Nijin and Jinin. Gods motives and domains may also change and there is most certainly a wide range of unknown gods that are yet to be discovered.

Alternative Perspectives

The Eternal Priesthood is an ancient religion with a well-organised hierarchy, many grand temples, fascination with arcane artefacts and glorifies power as proof of divine favour. The Eternal faith is the dominant religion across Akharon, but there are variations of expression and theology within each culture.

The Eternal religion holds much power within the Holy Kingdom of Catla where the priesthood is incredibly rigid, heavy-handed, and dogmatically enforces both civil and religious law through their Arbiter priests (pg: 104). The Eternal faith is more accommodating of alternative religions within the Kingdom of Ire (pg: 82), and there are variations within the Priesthood between provinces; such as the unique techno-magical Radiant Knights within the lands of House Rubis. The barbaric Southern Legion Tribes (pg: 164) have a wilder expression of the religion, and hold Akh, and not Ath, up as the ruling god. There is also the Reformed Ta'Di religion that is followed by many Kaltorans and Twi-Far that merges traditional Ta'Di beliefs around spirits with the teachings of the Eternal Priesthood.

Traditional Ta'Di acknowledges the existence of the Eternal pantheon, but they see them as just Great Spirits, akin to many others through Akharon. With some possibly being Great Spirits of urban environments. The All-Faith does not see the Eternal gods as divine and suspects that they may not exist at all. All-Monks see Eternal Priests as misled at best, and charlatans at worst.

Akh, the Father of Civilisation

- **Domains of Influence:**
  - Civilisation (governments, cities, learning), air (weather, storms), family (marriage, fedality, nobility, knights, provision, protection, care), language & yellow sun (light).
- **Divine Servants:** Golden angles.
- **Iconography:** Yellow/gold twin suns (larger), home, crown, air.
- **Weapons:** Sword & halberd.

- **Common forms of Follower Worship:**
  - Burn incense, burnt expensive oils at dawn on an altar, fund temples and statues.
- **Common Follower Items:**
  - Blade and special weapons.
  - Religious and resplendent utilities.
- **Common Follower Magic:**
  - Those connected to fire, light, lightning and protection.

"Weep not for the All-Faith, spare no thought for the unreformed Ta'Di. These primitive religions wallow in the muck of ignorance with their worship of pagan gods. The Eternal gods have carved the truth of their supremacy into the body and soul of Akharon itself, embrace their truth and power."

– Duke Solomon Lowiking.

As the self-appointed king of the gods and supreme deity of the Eternal Priesthood, Akh sits enthroned in the heavens, eternally ruling over all civilized people. Reflecting the old Empire of Catla, Akh is most commonly depicted in the form of a multi-armed Tolatl, with a crown and a circular backrest upon his golden throne. This is reinforced by his domains of influence – civilisation, air, family and the great yellow sun.

Akh is worshipped throughout the nations, thanked at daily meals, and represented by temples in almost every city and town. He is especially venerated for his generosity, nobility and honour, through which he managed to unite most of the Eternal pantheon during the Age of Illumination and establish the shape of civilisation as it is known today. Despite Akh's reputation for wise council, he is nonetheless a fearsome combatant, renowned for his many victories over great monsters of Neph and Dos. His magic is infused within two of his divine treasures: the blinding **Runeblade of Light**, and the fiery **Golden Halberd**.

Turbulent Marriage

Akh and the goddess Corp were married in the early days of the Age of Illumination after the wild goddess Neph was driven back, and for a time, they were everything the king and queen of the gods should have been. Akh was endeared to Corp for her intelligence and fierce spirit, as well as her domains of influence being so fascinatingly different to his own. Corp was smitten with Akh's vast wealth and grew to love his loyalty and bravery. It is said that on the day of their wedding, the yellow sun and a bright silver moon met in the sky, bathing Akharon in a celebratory silver-gold light.

However, Corp's moonlit trysts with mortals soon became legendary, and her wild outbursts were not always to her husband's liking, sparking quarrels that can last for days. These periods of marital strife have a profound effect on the mortal world, stirring up hurricanes, maelstroms and lightning storms, although the two always seem to resolve their differences in the end.

Beloved God

Akh is fond of mortals, although this is far from a relationship of equals. The people of Akharon are wayward children, simple beings who cannot grasp the divine, and so Akh selflessly casts his light upon the world, receiving prayers and worship in exchange for his protection and leadership. Despite his role as the supreme ruler of civilised people, he remains baffled by many aspects of earthly life, and legends often depict Akh as somewhat clumsy in his divine gifts. These include enchanting a Thud Cow farmer's milk to flow endlessly, which rises in a flood to drench a hapless town; gifting a faithful priest with the ability to summon the sun when he smiles, ruining the sleep of the poor man and his family; blessing a kind and wise queen with scores of descendants, resulting in her being endlessly pregnant. Bards deploy these tales to raucous laughter, although rather than being sources of mockery, they are encouraged by priests for illustrating Akh's complex nature: it is a source of pride that the Father of Civilisation remains interested in the desires of people and is much like them with both successes and failures.

Amongst the nobility, Akh is renowned for his authority and love of fine culture. Great knightly tournaments, dances and festivals are routinely dedicated to the king of the gods. The **Masquerade Solstice** takes place on the longest day of the year and sees the streets of many towns and cities teeming with citizens in elaborate sun-themed masks. These represent anonymity and equality in Akh's glorious sunlight, encouraging joyous abandon and dancing with anyone who lacks a partner. While this is his most prominent occasion, the blessing of Akh is invoked at many other times, priestly astronomers keep a watchful eye on the movements of the great yellow sun to divine Akh's will.

Alternative Perspectives

Akh is seen as a great foe and a fool by the Drasong Clan, western Giants, Southern Tribes and those monstrous creatures who are born of Neph. He is the god of prey people who hide in cities and give power to words over action. They believe that those who worship Akh do so because he is weak and can be used, a puppet god who pretends to be a divine king.

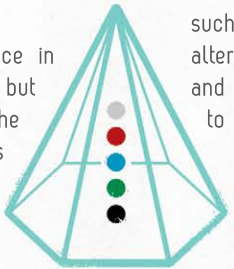
The Holy Kingdom of Catla see Akh as especially powerful, authoritative and wise. Their king is his divine voice to mortals, imbued with his authority. The priesthood of the Holy Kingdom are the only ones who see Akh as the ultimate divine king over all gods, all other nations believe that Dos, Jinin, Nijin, Nix and Ugra'thok are not bound to his commands.

Arcane Wielders of Pol

- **Domains of Influence:**
  - Techno and alchemical magic.
  - Pri (runes), Sec (gestures), Ter (potions), Qua-Novus (binding) & Qui (artefacts).
- **Pol's Domains of Influence:**
  - Magic (alchemy), metal & knowledge.
- **Divine Servants of Pol:** Children of Pol.
- **Iconography:** Pyramid(s), dots of colour.
- **Weapons:** Magic (alchemy & techno-magic).

- **Common forms of Follower Worship:**
  - Explore divine ruins, fund temples and techno-magic institutes, invent new technology, melt broken metal objects on an altar, study techno-magic and alchemy, work with metal.
- **Common Follower Items:**
  - Techno-magic special and companion weapons.
  - Metal outfits.
  - Metallurgy, techno-magic, focus and potion utilities.
- **Common Follower Magic:**
  - Those connected to cosmic and metal.

"We may never truly grasp the cost of Fik's sacrifice in relinquishing her Archon servants – not just to herself, but to us, to Akharon and perhaps even to the gods. Once the stewards of the stars, charged with unravelling the mysteries of fate, they have now been bound to the stewardship of techno-magic. Their ancient work, abandoned, will remain forever incomplete, leaving the tapestry of destiny frayed and unfinished.



Though this arrangement may be how it was always to be."

– High Priestess Odile Valdis,
Codex Luminfatum.

At the dawn of creation, when Mon lived and the primordial elements of Akharon were chaotic and new, one god took it upon himself to tame and understand their power. That deity was the great metal god Pol, dearest companion of Dray and second born of the Eternal pantheon. He called his knowledge magic; the transformation of raging primordial forces into well-ordered and usable tools.

Everything would change on the day Neph viciously slew Pol after he intervened to defend the creation of the Tolatl and Legion people by the young gods Akh and Ath. The enraged goddess hacked his body to pieces and cast his corpse down to Akharon. Dray wept for his dead brother, and with a master the Children of Pol went mad, becoming one more scourge on the face of Akharon.

Pol's severed arm is visible for all to see and now rests at the centre of Stronghold, casting its silent divine blessing over that most holy of cities. The gigantic, glinting metal appendage is held as supremely sacred, and his body is the foundation of all modern techno-magic.

While Dray took over some of his brother's domains, most of his obligations over magic were left without a divine guardian. Moved by the sorrow of her beloved Dray, the silent goddess Fik offered the expertise of her most gifted Archon servants to take up the task. They would hereafter be known as the Arcane Wielders of Pol, sharing the burden amongst themselves by stewarding the five aspects of techno-magic.

Pri, Runes

As the wisest of the Archons, Pri was assigned to the domain of runes and became the leader of the Arcane Wielders. In the distant past she was content to maintain the isolated Library of Glimmerlight located deep within Fik's palace, where Pri could consume eternal knowledge to her heart's content. Although now begrudgingly busier, she revels in the academic nature of runes, avidly expanding her knowledge of how they form more than just an interface between a user and their magical items.

- **Truth:** Runes are programming languages such as the common CC (Corp Code) or the rare AC (Archon Code) and PC (Palantor Code). They also cover GUI (graphic user interfaces) elements such as menus, buttons, icons and links. Psionic nanites are altering code to match people's expectations about magic and the Eternal gods, changing the presentation of programs to appear as runic symbols.

Sec, Gestures

By far the most reluctant, Sec only took on the role of Arcane Wielder because her mistress required it of her. Hot-blooded and ill-suited to poring over dusty tomes, Sec claimed the domain of gestures, hoping that it would have the closest relation to action and combat. She is especially popular with young techno-mages who struggle with dry academics. Sec is famed for her development of combat spells that are more beautifully simple than intricate and long. A perfect motion of the hand can cover for a dozen words and gadgets.

- **Truth:** The psionic nanites that have infested Akharon have learned that people expect magic to require complex hand gestures and rituals to perform, especially if they are powerful. They have been altering sci-fi programming to respond to these hand gestures, despite them not previously requiring them. Gestures also covers the ability to aim, direct and throw techno-magical objects.

> "Techno-magic is the magic of civilisation and the Eternal gods – the highest form of power, growing with each generation as it builds upon the work of those who came before."
>
> – Citli Sootmount,
> Tolatl techno-forger.

Ter, Potions

In her wearier moments, Ter believes her sole purpose is to temper the impulses of her twin sister Sec. Calculating, slow to act and thoughtful by nature, Ter long admired the work of Pol, and was devastated by the god's death. Her determination as an Arcane Wielder is unmatched, and she seized upon his domain of potions with a blazing fervour as it is the oldest style of techno-magic. Ter's patience makes her well-suited to potion development, enjoying the steady process of research, gathering ingredients, and carefully crafting for maximum effect.

» **Truth:** Techno-magic started out as alchemy, where mages would use harvested components from sci-fi technology to create potions with spell-like effects. Many of these potions are chemical (such as cryo-fluid for ice potions, combustible fuel for fire, etc...), and the most powerful potions are based on 'sparks' (Palantor-created nanites that feed on specific combinations of materials).

Qua-Novus, Binding

The first to claim the domain of binding was Qua, a supremely competent servant of Fik and a paragon of everything from magical study to application. In the early years of the Age of Illumination when the gods walked the earth, a group of Twi-Far who hated the gods slew Qua and stole her power for themselves.

An additional Archon was summoned to fill the role and given the name Qua-Novus. The new Archon Wielder was clumsy and woefully inexperienced, but was nonetheless determined to master the art of binding and the wishes of her master Fik. The god Dray was frequently collaborating with the Wielders by this time, and had pity on Qua-Novus, mentoring the young Wielder on the finer aspects of metalwork and drawing primal power into objects.

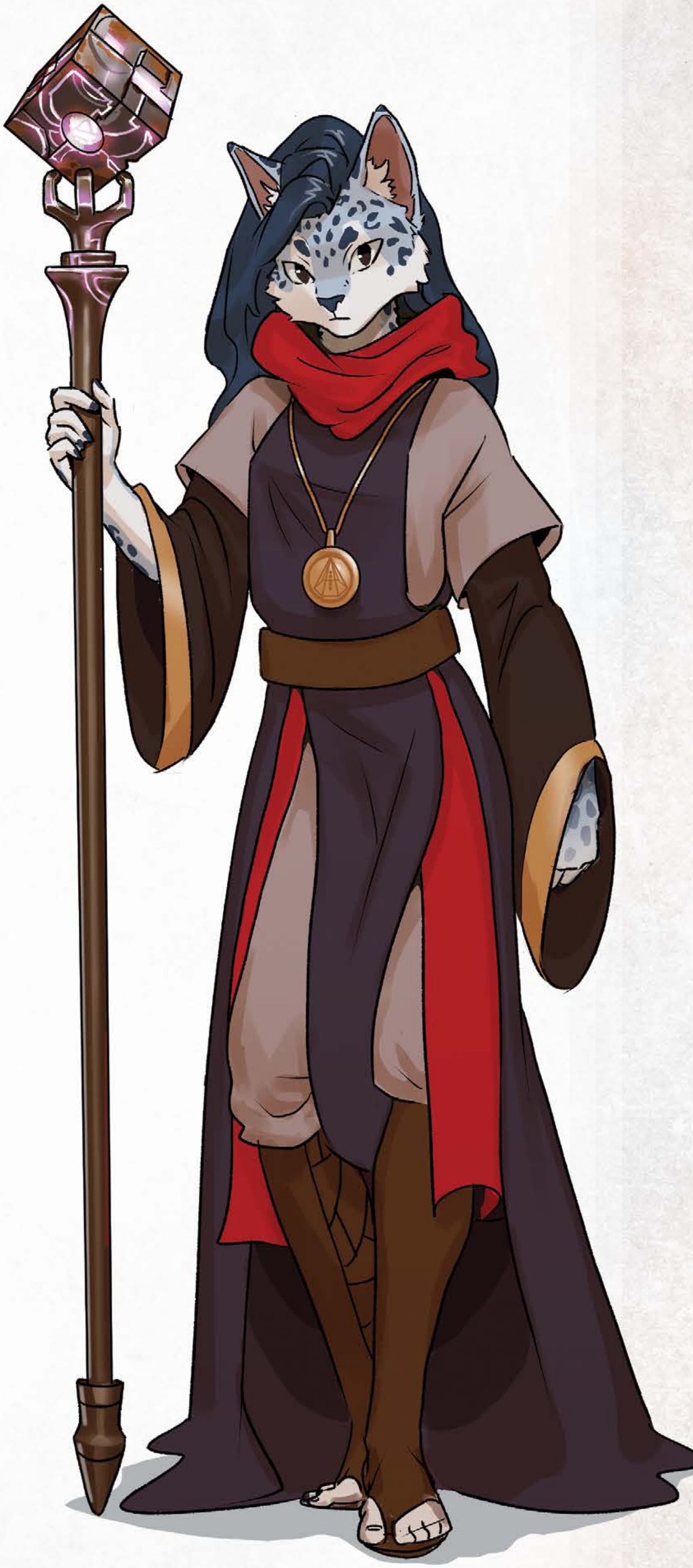
» **Truth:** Binding is the art of combining different technological objects together with a source of power to allow them to function... often in ways they were not originally designed for.

Qui, Artefacts

A joyful spirit with an insatiably curious mind, Qui readily accepted the magical domain of artefacts and was keen to expand her understanding of what was possible. The recent surge of popularity in the field of techno-magic has made her a prominent figure within the Holy Kingdom of Catla.

Qui is all too content to lock herself in her divine laboratory for months at a time, only to emerge with a new creation. Her enthusiasm for better, stronger and (often) more explosive artefacts has given her siblings cause for concern, but none can doubt Qui's talents, nor her passion for her role.

» **Truth:** Artefacts covers sci-fi objects that have been recovered from ruins, and techno-magical objects that have been crafted from scratch with some sci-fi components.



Remnant techno-mage of Pol.

Ath, the Wise Warrior

- **Domains of Influence:**
  - Wisdom, war (courage, martial skill, tactics), loyalty, sacrifice, self-control (bravery, duty), birds & red sun (fire).
- **Divine Servants:** Crimson angles.
- **Iconography:**
  - Red twin suns (smaller), shields, birds of prey, light beams.
- **Weapons:** Axe, mace, shield.

- **Common forms of Follower Worship:**
  - Burnt animal sacrifices at dawn on an altar, fund temples and tournaments, win tournaments, study warfare.
- **Common Follower Items:**
  - Blade and hammer weapons with Shield modification.
  - Heavy outfits.
  - Tome, divine and resplendent utilities.
- **Common Follower Magic:**
  - Those connected to blood, fire, protection and wisdom.

"In the elder days, the gods were as the world – fierce as the storm, wild as the beast and cruel as the sea. Men bowed in fear, offering blood to the dark altars of an untamed Akharon. Yet Ath was never so. Born both wise and civilised, a lordly lady of light who took upon herself the duty to guard and cultivate order among all people.

All gods feel the pull of their ancient ways – some more than others. But Ath has no such past to return to, and we, the stewards of history, find no small irony in watching her become what she never was."

– Miriam Script,
Scholar of Ancient History.

Eternal though they may be, not every god is able to stand the test of time. Such is the fate of Ath, the Wise Warrior; a goddess fallen from her lofty position, her wisdom no longer heeded as the world pursues a new course. In previous ages during the grand expansions of the ancient Empire of Catla and the devastating Druidic War, Ath was revered across the lands as a goddess of victory and sage counsel. Now, Ath's great temples are crumbling and overgrown with vines – a brutal reminder of how even love and adoration may be swept away by the passage of time.

For all of her life Ath has shone as brightly as her twin brother, Akh. Both are sun gods and the creators of civilisation, him of the Tolatl and Akharon's the larger yellow sun, her of the Legion and the smaller red sun. Akh the ruler and Ath the guardian.

When darkness in its many forms crept into the world, Ath was quick to take up arms, guiding her noble Legion into battle and victory. Her exploits against Neph's many schemes during the Age of Illumination earned her the title of 'Wise Warrior', and for six hundred years the goddess was at the very forefront of the Eternal pantheon with her brother, beloved by the people and instrumental in crafting the foundations of the Empire of Catla.

Long did Ath struggle against the machinations of Neph, and over the aeons their rivalry grew from bitterness to seething revulsion. Even after Akharon emerged from the Age of Darkness and civilisations flourished across the world, Ath still waged war against the wild goddess of nature. In a supreme act of malicious mischief or misunderstanding, the goddess Nix convinced Ath of a great prophecy: that she would one day pierce Neph's heart with her flaming axe, ending her threat for all time. When Neph was instead slain by the shy and meek goddess Fik, shock gripped the pantheon, but none more so than Ath. A new Age of Gods was upon them, as their greatest threat had been vanquished, the divine lords could once again walk the earth of Akharon without provoking celestial war. All of this was brought about by the little Fik and not the mighty Ath.

Over time the people of the Kingdom of Ire have come to see Ath as a symbol of the old Empire and their ambitions for conquest. At the same time, the Holy Kingdom of Catla has grown to see Ath as weak for being upstaged by Fik and as a barbaric goddess of the Southern Legion Tribes.

The temples to Ath have grown dusty and her place in festivals has steadily dwindled. Civilisation's champion is now depicted in tales as a warrior of sunken eyes, dented armour and blunted weapons, and few bother to offer tribute to a goddess who failed to live up to her reputation.

Alternative Perspectives

Only in one corner of Akharon does Ath retain her lofty position: the Southern Legion Tribes. Possessing long memories, the Legion still venerate Ath as their creator, protector and warrior without peer. To the Southern Tribes, Ath is the true master of the gods, a position that grew even stronger when she – and not Fik – was the one to slay Neph. The Tribes despise Catla's attempts to temper the traits of the Eternal pantheon, especially the emphasis of Ath's wisdom and guidance of civilisation over her warrior spirit. They refer to Catla's version of Ath as toothless and false, they worship Ath in her purest form as a bloody and cunning goddess of war.

The blood-soaked priests and priestesses of Ath among the Southern Tribes are known as Bloodreavers (pg: 165). They are tasked with sacrificing prisoners of war and the gravely ill to the goddess. The Bloodreavers of the Kingdom of Romanos are notably more tame, as they claim to only sacrafice animals.

Some outspoken Eternal priests believe the nations will come to regret their neglect of Ath, and that Nix's prophecy is still yet to be fulfilled. Neph was the most powerful of the gods, lord over both life and death, and Nix loves to play tricks and games. If Neph were to be reborn in some form, Ath may be the key to her demise, and may allow those nations that abandoned her to feel the consequences of their actions.

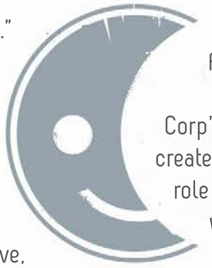
Corp, the Two-Faced Merchant

- See Currency write-up on pg: 81.

- **Domains of Influence:**
  - Commerce (money, trade, management, thieves), luck (good & bad fortune), water (fishing, ships, travel, messengers), hounds & moon.
- **Divine Servants:** Great Werewolves.
- **Iconography:**
  - Silver moon with a smiling/frowning face, golden smiling face, waves, hound, bag of coins, wagon, ship.
- **Weapon:** Dagger.

- **Common forms of Follower Worship:**
  - Avoid charity, cast valuables into the sea during long voyages, fund temples, leave coins on traveller shrines, study moon cycles, visit 'companions' of the night.
- **Common Follower Items:**
  - Small weapons.
  - Outfits with the Fashionable modification.
- **Common Follower Magic:**
  - Those connected to air, luck, lightning, travel and water.

> "Fair or foul, the coin flip is random; your response is not."
> – Common saying.



In the Holy Kingdom of Catla and the Kingdom of Ire, to call someone 'two-faced' is usually a compliment. Two-facedness is to have complex personality traits that are seemingly contradictory; such as being introverted and charismatic, sensible and spontaneous, resilient and sensitive, creative and analytical, or to be an optimistic realist. This saying owes its origin entirely to Corp, the goddess of fortune, water, hounds and the moon.

True to her reputation, the sister of Dray is a sea of traits in tension, both positive and questionable. Some see her in a simplistic light, like flicking a coin and not knowing what side you will get: consistency, prosperity, hard work and peace... or capricious, misfortune, laziness and adversity. While others understand her as incredibly nuanced, with depths that can be deciphered with patience and understanding. All agree that the goddess is incredibly productive, reaping the benefits of her marriage to Akh and covering Akharon in many grand buildings during the Age of Illumination. Her areas of domain were earned through extraordinary exploits, and although she is no goddess of war, many a divine battle owes their success to Corp's shrewd management of resources and power.

Society likes to think of Corp solely as the goddess of merchants, luck, ships and the like. However, her priests are clear that she is also the goddess of prostitutes, thievery and werecreatures. Nearly all thieves and workers of the night pay regular tribute to her temples, and it is not uncommon for priests to moonlight as pickpockets. Corp does not create therianthropes (pg: 43), though she enjoys bringing out their unchained nature, especially during full moons.

Rage & Hard Work

Corp is well-known for her changeable mood, her calm facade crumbling to rage when she does not get what she wants. This is embodied in her divine influence over the sea, and offering tribute to Corp is a common occurrence at the outset of even small voyages. As the goddess of commerce, she has a love for all things deemed precious, although this definition may vary; assuaging her wrath may be as costly as sacrificing a silver goblet to watery pools within her temple, or as simple as rubbing the head or belly of a hound statue when making a daily purchase. It is said that Corp's mood can be told by gazing at the moon: full moons foretell good luck for travellers and merchants, while the opposite is true during a new moon, blessing the ventures of thieves and swindlers. All reason is discarded during great storms, as Akh and Corp are fighting once again.

The legends show a particular fascination with Corp's marriage to Akh. While often happy together, Corp's trysts are wild and unpredictable, with both mortals and gods catching her fancy. Whether out of frustration with her straight-laced and dim husband, or simply revelling in her own impulses, the Two-Faced Merchant has a reputation for scandal. She has become a symbol of martial unfaithfulness, while Akh is the paragon of family virtue.

Corp's vast storehouses of heavenly wealth have done little to create a generous spirit, and she disdains excessive charity for its role in encouraging idleness. Poverty is to be fought through hard work and giving jobs to those in need of coin. Legends depict her punishing excessive charity and other unproductive behaviour; such as turning a group of lazy kids into statues of cursed silver and gold, or causing a camp of homeless families to be washed away in a flood when they refused to work a farmer's field for grain scraps. Roadside shrines to Corp are common, where travellers may leave coins for the benefit of those in temporary need; however, the taker is expected to pay back the debt as soon as their fortunes improve.

Alternative Perspectives

The Southern Legion Tribes and the Kraken Isle Pirates emphasise Corp's selfish and belligerent nature. They seek to appease her by sacrificing plunder into the ocean's depths and directing their raids against those they deem unworthy of prosperity. To these seafaring peoples, Corp is not the goddess of indulgent and fat merchants but the Coral Queen, the Sea Shrew and the Tidal Termagant. While the civilised nations envision Corp as elegant, mathematical and complex, the Tribes and Isle Folk portray her as tempestuous, adorned with coral and the bones of sea creatures, reigning from a throne of treasure chests and shipwrecks.

The All-Monks have a particular dislike of Corp, as they see her as an immoral and corrupting influence. Her priests and priestesses encourage greed, teach against charity, live for material gains and often work with both thieves and prostitutes.

Dos, the Nasty Bastard

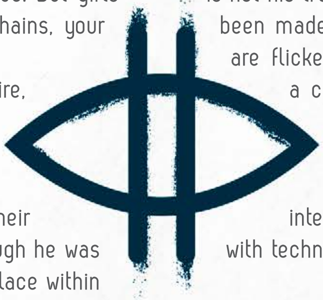
- See Creet write-up from pg: 8.

- **Domains of Influence:**
  - Sorrow (both cause & relief), war (fear, chaos), unruly children, curses, nightmares & cats.
- **Divine Servants:** Demons.
- **Iconography:** Eye with two lines, multiple eyes, crystals.
- **Weapons:** Glaive, twin axes & enchantment (mind).

- **Common forms of Follower Worship:**
  - Fund cults. converse with demons, sacrifices nix/fey dust or unwilling people on an altar. self-mutilation by marking your flesh with tattoos and scars.
- **Common Follower Items:**
  - Blade, companion and special weapons.
  - Black outfits.
  - Grimoire and magic utilities.
- **Common Follower Magic:**
  - Those connected to death, demons, mind and smoke.

"He will give you what you ask – love, power, peace. But gifts from him always cut deep. Your love will turn to chains, your power to ruin, your peace to loneliness."

– Sahrakhan Darkfire,
Twi-Far demonologist.



All gods within the Eternal pantheon were created by Mon to have a place looking over Akharon, and their destinies are written in the stars. Not so with Dos, though he was created by Mon he is not from this world and has no place within it. He is a scourge that came from across the void, an archdemon of endless nightmares and evil schemes. It is unknown why Dos abandoned his world and its pantheon of gods, it is assumed that he was following Mon, though he was too late and his great creator had died before his arrival on Akharon.

Though he was initially unnoticed by the gods, Dos gained his title after he provoked a war between the Eternal pantheon and a Goblin Queen, a bloody conflict that resulted in the deaths of many mortals and divine servants. Summoned to Akh's court to answer for his actions, Dos' only defence was a round of hearty laughter and the words "for the singular purpose of magnificent contest." Enraged beyond reason, the sun god Akh forgot his propriety for a moment, vehemently declaring Dos a "nasty bastard, unfit for the raiment of divinity". The assembled gods were taken aback by Akh's uncharacteristic outburst, and much to Dos' delight and amusement, the title stuck.

All a Game

To Dos, reality is a game, with himself as the only player and all others as mere pieces to be used for his gain. Even the other gods disdain his presence, rarely allowing him into their council, although Nix has occasionally participated in a twisted venture of trickery. Dos lives only for himself and will do anything to grow in power.

Dos lounges on a throne of glittering crystal within his void palace, his royal court laid out as an enchanted game board that has very real power over real-world people and events. From here he sends out his demonic minions to found cults, possess the minds of mortals and secure caches of treasure. He occasionally roams Akharon as an incorporeal cloud of black smoke, a possessing spirit, seeking new and greater challenges to sharpen his formidable intellect, and ever on the lookout for weak wills and overinflated egos in need of exploitation. The Nasty Bastard is the undisputed master of possession – especially of enchanters – revelling in the act of turning friend against ally and pitting techno-magic devices against their owners.

Unlike all other gods, Dos is forever listening and eager to openly answer the prayers of mortals. He would have them believe that he and his demons are bound to contracts and vows, and can be tricked or bested. But no law holds him, least of all his own words.

Twisted Creations

Dos can not truly create as other Eternal deities can, as Akharon is not his true home. He can only twist and bend what has already been made. His nightmarish **Demons** are made of nix dust, and are flickering smoke-like entities that are unable to maintain a corporeal form for long. The Children of Pol are ideal puppets as they are without a god, but even they will eventually fight off his possessing spirit. With the goddess Neph dead, Dos has now turned his vile intent towards wild Neph Spawn monsters, merging them with techno-magic to become **Hellbeasts**.

Dos' two greatest servants are the **Uberhydra** and the **Pale Beast**. The hydra is a Hellbeast of his own creation, cooked up with wylding magic inside a lost divine ruin to Neph. It is a giant multi-headed monster who roams the seas and coasts of Akharon in search of victims. The Pale Beast is a great white Demon that steals away souls and is said to appear in the dreams of those who display indifference and complacency towards a great evil.

Alternative Perspectives

House Lagos within the Kingdom of Ire is the only house that permits open worship of Dos, as they see him as part of the divine pantheon. As with Neph, mortals ignore the gods at great risk.

The **Creet** were formed by Dos from alien crystals from his own planet, but they have evolved beyond his control. Their entire society is formed around hiding from him. The **Jinn** are ancient Twi-Far and cosmic spirits who have been twisted by Dos into powerful entities. They are now enslaved by the Drasong Clan and remain loyal to Dos.

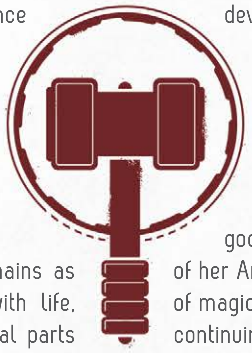
- **Truth:** Dos is an insane Palantor MVP or Mechonid who lives within a massive swarm of psionic nanites. They think they are playing a game and that all the people of Akharon are NPCs for their enjoyment. Demons are holograms and/or nanite swarms.

Dray, the Passionate Builder

- **Domains of Influence:**
    - Craftmanship/skill (smithing, building, crafting), passion (romance, friendship & work), stone & metal.
- **Divine Servants:** Automaton of Dray, Forge Soldiers.
- **Iconography:** Hammer, ring around a planet, anvil, kind face.
- **Weapons:** Hammer & crossbow.

- **Common forms of Follower Worship:**
    - Create beautiful tools and works of art, fund temples, teach apprentices, public displays of love and passion.
- **Common Follower Items:**
    - Hammer, fire and metal weapons with many modifications.
    - Metal outfits.
    - Resplendent utilities.
- **Common Follower Magic:**
    - Those connected to metal and passion.

> "Unfortunately, Dray's passion is equalled by his short attention span, and not once in the long millennia has it crossed his frenetic mind to keep proper inventory. Many of Dray's mechanical creations have escaped his workshop, possessing autonomous intelligence but lacking purpose. Some of the more volatile present a great danger to settlements and travellers, although priests of Dray declare them to be sacred, the same as any other divine artefact."
>
> – Tlaloc Ripfield,
> Tolatl techno-mage.



Of all the Eternal pantheon, none rule over their domains as fervently as Dray, the Passionate Builder. Brimming with life, his mind aflame with fantastic ideas, Dray's zeal is equal parts exhausting and invigorating, whether his dealings are with god or mortal.

Dray is said to have been born alongside his twin sister Corp during the formation of Akharon's when the land was separated from the seas, far back in the early years of the Age of Creation after the creation of the gods Neph and Pol. In his youth, he disdained crafting of all kinds, lacking the patience to focus on a project for any length of time. Instead, he and his older brother Pol – god of magic and metal – would roam across the breadth of Akharon, seeking merriment and pleasure. The elusive goddess Nix was the only one who could resist Dray's muscular physique and enchanting personality, vexing the young god and making her seem irresistible.

Learning that Nix prized mirrors, Dray laid hand on tools for the very first time, discovering a talent as he sought to craft his beloved the most beautiful mirror in existence. Each time the goddess would flutter her eyelashes, declaring the mirror to be not quite perfect, but promising him a kiss when the gift was truly flawless. This would never come to pass – Nix was merely toying with her suitor's emotions – but Dray would steadily be recognised for his craftsmanship, his skills became legendary throughout the pantheon, impressing even his father Mon.

The Passionate Builder is a prominent figure within the Eternal Priesthood, as his artefacts are scattered across Akharon and he is beloved by many commoners. Depictions of him are always striking, and could be mistaken for a god of fertility or love rather than one of industry. Joyous smile, long flowing platinum hair, bronze skin, massive limbs, hammer in hand and the barest of – if any – clothing.

It is for these reasons that Dray is popular among younger worshippers, representing the passion, exuberance and joyful abandon of youth. Tellingly, **Sweltermeet** – the most prominent festival in his and Fik's honour – is a night entirely dedicated to friendship and love, featuring the exchange of gifts and revelry until the rising of the suns. However, Dray is also celebrated for his indomitable work ethic, with everyone from hardy blacksmiths to gilded priests taking the god's cheerful attitude towards toil as a golden example. These traits have also ingratiated Dray with the goddess Corp for his hard work, and the god Etso for his wild parties.

Grief, Blindness & Love

Dray loved his brother Pol more than any other, and was utterly devastated by his death at the hands of Neph. It is said that on the day Pol died, the flames of his workshop were allowed to go dark for the first time, and the normally talkative god refused to speak for a year and a day afterward. Upon his reemergence, Dray took on a portion of his brother's former domain – metal – as his own, creating weapons for many of the other gods. The quiet goddess Fik comforted him during this time and gave up five of her Archon servants to work with Dray, maintaining the domains of magic. The foolish Dray did not notice Fik's love for him, instead continuing to pine for Nix.

Dray's fraught love life would drastically alter the fate of Akharon. In a rare moment of impulse control, He refused a bribe from Neph: a flower that would ensnare Nix's affections, but only in the form of lust. An enraged Neph wounded Dray and forced him to craft her a weapon under pain of death. A quietly observing Fik could not bear to see her beloved in such distress, raising both her voice and her giant scissors in an act that defied fate itself. With a single snip of her blades Neph was decapitated, and the incident ignited a connection between the quiet goddess and the Passionate Builder. At long last, Dray had found his soulmate: not an object of lust, but an equal, a loyal companion, and eventually a wife with whom he could share the aeons.

Alternative Perspectives

Dray's character is exaggerated depending on the place of worship: a symbol of ultimate dedication to one's craft in the Holy Kingdom of Catla, a beacon of love in the Kingdom of Ire, and a frenzied builder of grand war machines to the southern tribes.

Dray is the only god that the brutal Drasong Clan will tolerate, as he cared deeply for their creator Pol, and is the god who could understand their pain.

Etso, the Reveller

- **Domains of Influence:**
  - Festivities, music, ale, madness (both cause & cure), genius, peace (negotiation, compromise, emissaries) & rainbows.
- **Divine Servants:** Goblins.
- **Iconography:**
  - Golden goblet, red wine, platter of food, harp, multi-faced dice, rainbow, fat man, red nose.
- **Weapon:** None.

- **Common forms of Follower Worship:**
  - Sacrifice food and drink on elaborate altars, participate in feasts, fund scholars and festivals, get drunk, study, care for the mentally unstable.
- **Common Follower Items:**
  - Light Outfits with the Fashionable modification.
  - Potion utilities that you drink.
- **Common Follower Magic:**
  - Those connected to cosmic and mind.

"He is the fat god of new wisdom and spilt wine, where drunken ramblings birth change, and scholars stumble into truth."

– Solomon Scrub,
Kaltoran scholar.

Everything has its time, and all things must remain in balance. Etso the Reveller is often dismissed as a figure of eternal pleasure, hedonism and merriment, encouraging mortals to forsake their duties for endless festivity. However, to those who take the time to understand the true principles of Etso, he is revealed as a figure of surprising sobriety, even profundity, enshrining the art of celebration while acknowledging the labour that gives it true value.

So that there can be no mistake: Etso adores festivity above all else, firmly believing in revelry as one of life's chief goals. Priests of Etso are highly skilled in the arts of brewing and winemaking, leading to the reputation of 'red-nosed keepers', permanently drunk and sleeping through the day. While keepers of Etso's temples are exposed to much alcoholic temptation, their creed heavily enforces the importance of five central tenets:

- Toil and revelry: without one, the other withers and dies.
- Pine not for days in the sun, for rain makes them all the sweeter.
- Should days be wiled away in sleep, there exists no point in waking.
- Sour wine and ashen mirth are the just reward of the slothful.
- The foundation of a clear mind is a season of madness.

To an outsider, some of these tenets may appear redundant, overlapping or even nonsensical. To those who follow the way of the Reveller, each contains a subtle meaning that governs the very nature of happiness and strife, granting a clearer picture of the role of mortals in an age ruled by gods.

House of Madness

Etso is well known for his association with madness, and his influence is felt in asylums across the kingdoms of Akharon, known as 'Etso's House'. These are kept by Etso's followers, each one dedicated to his name in the same way as a temple, and tributes of food are even distributed to the inmates. Although conditions are often harsh, they are considered a marked improvement over lives on the street, as the keepers make efforts to understand the cause of their patient's mental afflictions and lead them back to sanity.

Many Faced God

Etso is a complex figure in ancient legends; sometimes a harmless fool, often a disarming trickster, and occasionally a source of surprising wisdom. Many are the tales in which he fools other beings into drinking from his enchanted wine goblet. The draught within causes madness to varying degrees, driving gods into temporary delirium, and some unfortunate mortals permanently insane. However, as stated in Etso's fifth tenet, stories regularly depict this madness as beneficial, often by averting a great disaster.

The climax of the 'Epic of Dray and Pol' sees the brothers facing down an army of monsters summoned by a Goblin Queen after they (accidentally) paid her a grievous insult. Etso offers to host a feast on the night before the battle, pretending to support Dray and Pol's annihilation, but secretly spiking the drinks of the entire fiendish army. Come the morn, all involved – Dray, Pol, Etso, the army and even the Goblin Queen herself – have spent the night in unrestrained jubilation. They greet the dawn with rousing and slurred song, their quarrel forgotten entirely. Considered by some to be an anticlimax, followers of Etso hold the tale as one of his finest moments, showing the power of celebration and the benefits of turning the entire table over to try something completely unexpected when all hope is lost.

Etso is afforded little respect by the Eternal pantheon, but he cares not for their petty squabbles, tempering their conflicts with his customary good cheer and terrible jokes. He serves in an unofficial capacity as peacemaker and is the only one Corp will listen to when she argues with Akh and is incited to fury. The only divine being who bears him genuine ill will is Nix, and her grievance is twofold: first, many of her created fey servants have abandoned her to serve Etso, drawn to his mirth and sense of fun. Second, Etso refuses to be offended or enraged by Nix's pranks, instead laughing along with the joke no matter how much he has been harmed, praising Nix for her creativity, and thus making her hate him all the more.

Alternative Perspectives

Etso is the only god apart from Ugra'Thok that the massive giants of the west will tolerate, as he has been known to come down from the heavens to visit their fallen god to keep him company. They still try to kill and eat him, but only half-heartedly. The Fey love Etso and have been known to grant safe passage through their realm to his followers. Some believe Etso's foolish ways are an act, hiding the mind and true divine genius.

Fik, of the Silent Cosmos

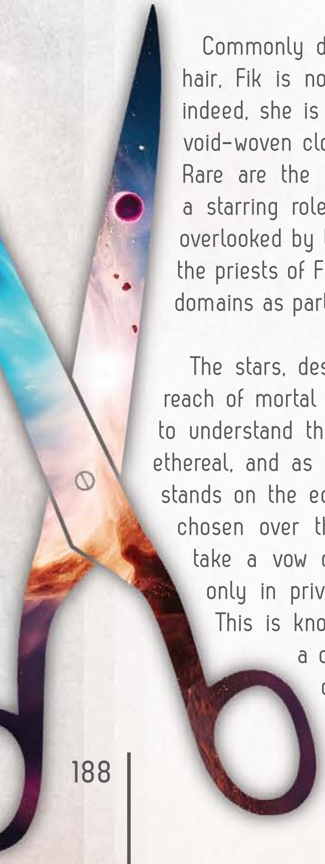
- See Death of Neph write-up on pg: 72.

- **Domains of Influence:**
  - Cosmos (stars, space/void), dreams, destiny/fate, memory & silence (listening, contemplation, patience).
- **Divine Servants:** Archons.
- **Iconography:**
  - Scissors, stars, geometric patterns, mouthless face.
- **Weapon:** Large scissors.

- **Common forms of Follower Worship:**
  - Keep vows of silence, fund temples, study astronomy and document the heavenly movements, create geometric art.
- **Common Follower Items:**
  - Blade weapons (often half-scissors).
  - Light outfits.
  - Grimoire and focus utilities.
- **Common Follower Magic:**
  - Those connected to cosmic, fate, silence and stealth.

"Be silent wretched fiend, for anguish comes to those who can not hear beyond their own voice."
– Fik, before killing Neph.
Written on all temples of Fik.

Silence is so often underestimated. Many are those who have thought lesser of Fik, first lady of the eternal void, for her dedication to reticence and her tranquil demeanour. They are all of them deceived, for this goddess of the stars, dreams, memory and fate is a being of boundless insight and scathing precision. Such is the way of Fik of the Silent Cosmos: the one whose whispers guide the course of history.



Commonly depicted as a lady with cascading raven-dark hair, Fik is not one to enrapture mortals with her beauty; indeed, she is often depicted as small, sickly and pale, her void-woven cloak allowing her to meld with the background. Rare are the tales in which the Lady of the Cosmos has a starring role, and while not disliked, she has long been overlooked by the people of Catla. This is often embraced by the priests of Fik, who gladly accept the goddess' unknowable domains as part of her character.

The stars, destiny, dreams: these concepts are beyond the reach of mortal minds, with Fik alone possessing the wisdom to understand them. Her thoughts bend eternally towards the ethereal, and as such, she speaks only at times when history stands on the edge of a knife, and only with words carefully chosen over the course of centuries. Priests of Fik often take a vow of silence in their patron's honour, speaking only in private to each other and at preordained times. This is known as **Fate's Discourse**, and is connected to a complex series of beliefs that govern methods of meditation, attitudes towards debate, and the divining of truth in all of its forms. Fik's priests are renowned for their observation and ability to see through deceit, and are often summoned as impartial aids in legal matters.

Marriage & Killing of Neph

The only regular recipient of Fik's voice is her husband Dray: a marriage born from conflict. As with all of her other exploits, Fik watched her beloved from afar, planning her approach and seeking the right moment. Obsessed with himself and incapable of holding his tongue, Dray spent millennia thinking Fik to be merely a good listener to his endless chattering. Despite her comfort after the death of their beloved brother Pol at the hands of Neph, and Fik giving up five of her Archon servants to carry Pol's domain of magic, their relationship did not change as he only had eyes for the goddess Nix. As a gift for her kindness, Dray crafted Fik a pair of scissors infused with her own power, giving her the ability to cut along the lines of fate itself.

Fik was still mostly ignored by the rest of the pantheon, and bullied relentlessly by Nix and Dos. When Neph – the most powerful of the gods – threatened Dray, tempting him with a magical flower that could secure Nix's desire, the small Fik confronted her with shaky hands and razor-sharp words, infused with longsuffering fury. With a single snip, Neph's head was parted from her shoulders, and a new fate was secured for Akharon. Never before had the goddess of the cosmos lifted a finger against her enemies, and the grisly act shook the Eternal pantheon to its very core. Astounded by the ferocity with which Fik defended his honour, Dray at long last felt a spark of true attraction towards the quiet goddess, and the two were soon wed. The little goddess has forever been treated with a degree of respect by the other gods that borders on fear.

Written in the Stars

Followers of Fik tend to share a keen interest in astronomy, as it is believed that Fik and the great creator Mon have weaved messages in the stars for those with the discernment to uncover them. The goddess' temples are often built with large skyward windows, and both priests and adherents keep nocturnal hours so that they may gaze skyward and divine Akharon's many mysteries. Those with an especially keen eye may become Astronomers of Fik, tasked with interpreting the movements of the heavens and advising rulers on their findings.

Alternative Perspectives

The Eternal priests of the Kingdom of Ire believe that when Fik killed Neph she usurped the dead goddess's influence over the Remnant, making them her people.

The Southern Legion Tribe believe it is a lie that the weak Fik killed the mighty Neph, and that it was Ath who truly killed the wild goddess of nature.

Some believe Fik changed or damaged fate when she killed Neph.

Jop Jop, the Just

- **Domains of Influence:**
  - Justice, vengence, ethereal spirits & earthquakes.
- **Divine Servants:** Great Spirits.
- **Iconography:**
  - Club with runes, ruinic circles, helm, wild woman.
- **Weapons:** Club.

- **Common forms of Follower Worship:**
  - Seek justice and revenge, carve drawings of clubs into the buildings and flesh of wrongdoers, acquire symbolic tattoos.
- **Common Follower Items:**
  - Hammer weapons.
  - Stance utilities.
- **Common Follower Magic:**
  - Those connected to destruction, forced movement, justice and protection.

> "Her simple ideas of justice are archaic and barbaric; 'apply club to skulls until behaviour improves or the enemy stops moving'. She is a goddess of vengeance and rage, not of justice and law. We must endeavour to change this perspective and elevate the minds of the common folk."
>
> – Lord Tizoc Catla,
> noble of the Holy Kingdom of Catla.

To those of education and standing, 'justice' evokes images of courts, judges, city guards and legal documents. To those of low-birth, justice takes a very different form: an answered prayer to a towering half-naked woman, skin bronzed and hair golden, striding across the land with ethereal spirits springing to life under her footsteps and a giant rune-etched wooden club held at the ready. Forever ready to deal out bloody justice no matter the social class of the villain, be they god, king, lord, peasant or beggar. This is Jop Jop the Just, goddess by nature and hero of the people by reputation.

This classic depiction of Jop Jop has no need of pomp and ceremony; she is celebrated nightly in taverns across the land with rousing songs and tales, everything from her grandest battles to simple acts of justice on behalf of the poor and lowly. Her influence is also felt within the courts and among guards, as judges use small decorative clubs to call for order and hand down sentences, and many city watches have a club set into their armour as a symbol of their authority.

For a goddess known as 'the Just', Jop Jop is a far cry from the po-faced judges found in courthouses across the Holy Kingdom of Catla and many other nations. For centuries the nobility have worked to alter the perception of the goddess from 'rags and bloodlust' to 'regality and wisdom'. While statues of this more civilised version of the goddess are common in major cities and places of education, they have always failed to be adopted in regional temples and among the wider population, where her unpolished and raw persona gives hope and entertainment to those with hard lives.

Divine Tension

Jop Jop has always had a tense relationship with her fellow gods, as she regularly calls them to account for their actions and has a rather tense personality. Jop Jop's ancient divine rivals are Nix for her constant schemes of manipulation and the late Neph for her killing of Pol. The evil god Dos is no mere rival, but her loathed nemesis that she is constantly seeking to kill.

Unlike the other weapons of the gods, Jop Jop's nameless club was gifted to her by Mon at her creation. It is indestructible and woven with a deep power that prevents it from harming the innocent. As the bards gleefully elucidate, to Jop Jop, this means nothing; no one is innocent, not even herself. The club has been known to cause devastating earthquakes upon the defeat of an especially heinous villain, stirring up tsunamis and carving great rifts in the ground. Only once has it been stolen – by the Twi-Far rebel known as Faren Drasong who used it to maim Ugra'thok – and since then, Jop Jop has vowed to only relinquish the club from her hand when all injustice on Akharon has been reduced to mush.

Alternative Perspectives

No deity has created more disagreement over their true nature than Jop Jop. Some have suggested she may even be many gods.

During the long Age of Darkness, mortals held brutal and primitive perspectives of the gods that reflected their harsh lives. Many nobles simply see Jop Jop as a god that has not yet been fully understood and 'civilised' in the minds of commoners. This is the official doctrine of the Eternal priests within the Holy Kingdom of Catla who are quick to invoke the goddess (along with Akh) as the source of their many laws and the bestower of divine authority upon their **Arbiter** priests and **Inquisitors**.

The techno-magical warriors of House Rubis – known as the **Radiant Knights** – have a broader perspective of Jop Jop. While they understand her as a wild force of justice and vengeance, she is to be a source of inspiration and not to be replicated in style. She is the spirit of justice that fuels a passion for righteousness in others.

To the monstrous trolls, Jop Jop is one-half of their mono-deity **Ugra'Jop**. Carrying the light domains of rebirth, wisdom, community and health. They are her holy warriors who dine on the unworthy corpses of heretics to cure the planet of a great infection of ignorance and sickness.

To the Reformed Ta'Di she is the creator of the Great Spirits, a perspective that is also believed by most Eternal priests.

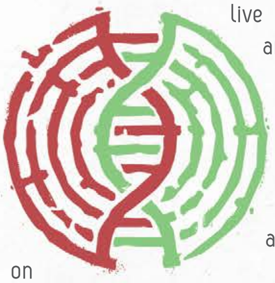
The All-Faith dislikes Jop Jop and the Eternal priesthood's perspectives of justice. The All-Monks have a strong emphasis on holiness, forgiveness and the equal value of all people. Jop Jop is primarily concerned with vengeance, and the Eternal priests focus on civic duty, loyalty and reinforcing their divine authority.

Nijin & Jinin, Wild Twins

- See Death of Neph write-up on pg: 72.

- **Nijin Domains of Influence:**
  - Life/death, fertility, monsters (small), plants & planting (agriculture and gardening).
- **Jinin Domains of Influence:**
  - Death/life, hunting (bows, tracking, traps), monsters (large), animals & harvest.
- **Divine Servants:** Neph Spawn.
- **Nijin Iconography:**
  - Green right half of a ruinic circle, leafed staff, tree (sapling).
- **Jinin Iconography:**
  - Brown left half of a ruinic circle, bone bow, multi-eyed skull.
- **Nijin Weapons:** Staff & magic (wylding).
- **Jinin Weapons:** Bow & magic (wylding).

- **Common forms of Follower Worship:**
  - Nijin: Assist births, have many children, carry wood icons, guard great plants, sacrifice plants to wild animals.
  - Jinin: Quickly end the life of hunted animals and use all of their parts, carry bone icons, sacrifice meat to wild animals.
- **Common Follower Items:**
  - Nijin: Hammer and special weapons.
  - Jinin: Range and special weapons.
  - Potion utilities.
- **Common Follower Magic:**
  - Nijin: Those connected to life and some death.
  - Jinin: Those connected to death and some life.



"Nijin and Jinin are the most commonly sighted gods on Akharon, having chosen to dwell in forests over the heavens."

– Sigrun Palesnout,
Dracim hunter.

In ages past, the now-dead goddess Neph occupied a strange place in the minds of the people. She was an eternal thorn in the sides of the other gods and all civilised rulers; she was the killer of the god Pol and the destroyer of the Empire of Catla, but also the god of life, death and nature. Her druidic servants were pushed out of society, but many prayed to her in secret for their crops to flourish and their children to be healthy. With the arrival of Neph's daughters – Nijin and Jinin – the civilised nations are determined to learn from their past mistakes and foster a positive relationship with these new gods of the wild.

When Neph was slain by the goddess Fik and her severed head cast down to Akharon, there was a great effusion of wylding blood that pooled into a great lake. From this arcane fluid arose Nijin and Jinin, daughters born to carry Neph's legacy. The explorers that journeyed to Neph's final resting place were shocked to see the young person-sized goddess frolicking in the green blood of their mother. They were quick to scamper away from the imposing knights, but they would be seen many times over the years as they refuse to live in the heavens alongside the other gods.

Worship of the Wild Twins is widespread, especially in rural regions where lives are closer to nature. Worship of Neph was characterized by fear, while the Twins are worshipped with respect and gratitude for the cycles of life. The greatest ceremony for the twins is the two-part **Feast of the Turns**, held once upon the first falls of autumn, and finished later in the year at the blooming of spring. The earlier feast honours Jinin – goddess of death and life – with a time of reflection on the impermanence of existence, and the new beginnings brought on by death. The second is continued months later as if the feast had never ended in honour of Nijin – goddess of life and death – with lively celebration and a chance to ponder the gift of life in all of its forms.

In all other matters, the Wild Twins are venerated together, acting as dual patrons of temples, thanked for bountiful harvests and successful hunts, and enshrined in prominent places wherever physicians ply their trade. Midwives in particular are especially favoured by Nijin, and Jinin holds hunters in high esteem.

Tales

In mythic legends both old and new, Nijin and Jinin do much to live up to their shared moniker. The Wild Twins are young and precocious, revelling in their power and constantly curious, and naïve to divine politics. They slip in and out of tales as both saviours and predators, their intentions never clear. They show fondness for those who respect nature and can live by its harsh rules, they bear no malevolence but are not to be trusted, for they are wild and untamed gods who care not for civilisation.

The Song of Falling Gold illustrates their attitude towards both gods and mortals: in this tale, Akh blesses a poor farmer with a single enchanted tree, its leaves gleaming gold. So long as the farmer eats one leaf each day, he would be sustained for his work. Nijin and Jinin begin to visit the tree each night, plucking off leaves and carelessly scattering them to the winds, until at last the tree has withered and died. Outraged by their cruelty, Akh demands an explanation; laughing, the twins show him the farmer's lands. Although the eternal magic has faded, the scattered leaves have infused the soil with their bounty, allowing the farmer to sow, reap and make an honest living from his toil for the rest of his days. Thus, do the Wild Twins impart their simple wisdom: life is far more than bland providence, and the sting of death may beget a far richer reward.

Alternative Perspectives

The twin goddesses have a curious relationship with the Archdruid, as both appear to be keeping an eye on the other to ensure they are not causing trouble, and both insist on doing whatever they want whenever they want.

Dragons have rejected Nijin and Jinin as their god, and Neph Spawn have mixed reactions to them. Monsters feel their divine power, but they do not have a special bond with them as they did with Neph. Time will tell if they become allies or enemies.

Nix, the Mischievous

- **Domains of Influence:**
  - Mischief (tricks, jokes, pranks), afterlife (soul, ghosts, eternal fate), beauty/art, time, night/darkness, magic (enchantment) & mirrors.
- **Divine Servants:** Vampires.
- **Iconography:**
  - Purple mirror, white/purple masks, lady with long hair, lady with transparent skin (visible bones), black glass.
- **Weapons:** Magic (enchantment, mind, time & death).

- **Common forms of Follower Worship:**
  - Perform burial rites, fund temples and art, carry mirror charms, perform nighttime rituals that include smoke and many mirrors, trick and humble the proud.
- **Common Follower Items:**
  - Blade and special weapons.
  - Black and purple outfits.
  - Grimoire and focus utilities.
- **Common Follower Magic:**
  - Those connected to afterlife, mind, time, tricks and reflection.

"Dark lady, whose shadows cradle the lost as they pass through the veil. Let time dissolve like a dream, and may we find eternal rest in your cold embrace."

– Pray of the Embrace.

Equal parts ruinously powerful, frighteningly cunning and impenetrably complex, Nix is a goddess of many faces and domains. The perception of Nix has drastically changed over the years, and in ages past she was regarded as a goddess of mirrors, murder, necromancy, witchcraft and a host of other foul traits. With the formation of the Empire of Catla, her darker sides were tempered, and the Nix worshipped in blackstone temples today is one of mystery rather than malevolence. However, her divine domains – the afterlife, mischief and darkness being among them – still carry an inherent dread of the unknown.

As befitting the one who taught all other gods the art of shapeshifting, Nix's appearance is in constant flux. She is an unrepentant temptress, gleefully manipulating the affections of men and women, mortal and god, and she takes on whichever form brings her the most amusement. Nix's true form is a transparent glass-like lady with visible bones, exotic spoon-shaped ears and a cloak of dust. Her beauty is that of a diamond, stunning and impenetrable, and liable to leave cutting wounds on any who draw close. And yet, Nix rejects the label of 'evil', scoffing at such terms as small-minded.

Judge of Souls

Despite her penchant for tricks, pranks and illicit trysts, she is charged with judging the dead, and does so with a remarkable sense of duty and decorum considering her other exploits. Recently departed souls are taken by the **Goblin Coachman** to **Amberglass**, Nix's otherworldly palace, where they must pass through the goddess' great mirror. Within the mirror, Nix's gaze penetrates their innermost being, judging their balance of light and darkness. Souls infused with light are laid to rest, while an imbalance of darkness will see that person trapped in a maze of reflections, where they eternally commit their life's deeds in a cycle of their own making. Nix is strangely protective of this duty, treating it with utmost reverence and refusing to discuss her methods of judgement with the other gods.

Through the Ages

In days long past, Nix's worshippers were outcasts from society, shunned for following a goddess of such foul exploits. They wandered Akharon as nomads, practising necromancy and shameful rituals in the name of their lady of the dark mirrors. The Nix of the modern era is a refined figure, worshipped openly for her dominion over beauty, art, time and enchantments, although to call her beloved would be a gross overstatement, as she remains the antagonist of choice in many children's tales and old legends.

In modern times avid followers of Nix have begun to augment their enchantment abilities through techno-magic, and the wonders produced from these experiments have somewhat softened the goddess' public perception. However, a clandestine few still follow the old ways, worshipping in secret the malevolent Nix of old. Every few months a necromantic coven, aristocratic death cult or salacious party is uncovered to much shame of a local community. The priests and priestesses of Nix always denounce such groups, but never too strongly.

The most sought-after of Nix's followers are her elite priestesses, those who have devoted themselves to the art of gazing through time. Known as **Oracles**, they make use of mirrors as a physical medium, divining the future and past to advise their patrons. Only a few attain the title due to the fiendishly complex nature of divination magic, which is liable to shatter the mind of the user without strict mental control. Despite the reputation of their goddess, as well as their sinister appearance – women concealed by tightly bound purple and black robes – Oracles command great respect across Akharon and are a permanent presence in most political courts.

Omens of Nix

Furthering the mischief goddess' association with time are the **Omens of Nix**, her three most powerful wraithly servants. Each were born from a faint reflection of Nix's own soul within her great mirror, stepping from the ancient glass and taking true form.

Omil the Crone was born from the pale image cast by the past and Nix's bones, **Loil the Mother** from a pure strand of Nix's hair and her great secret, and **Kanil the Maiden** from a dancing Nix in the future. The three respectively are unliving representations of the passage of time: the steady withering of the past, the maternal stability of the present, and the fickle, chaotic nature of the future. Although acting as history's grand overseer, Nix is content to delegate the governing of time's minutiae to her Omens, and it is these three that grant the power necessary for divination magic.

Divine Tension

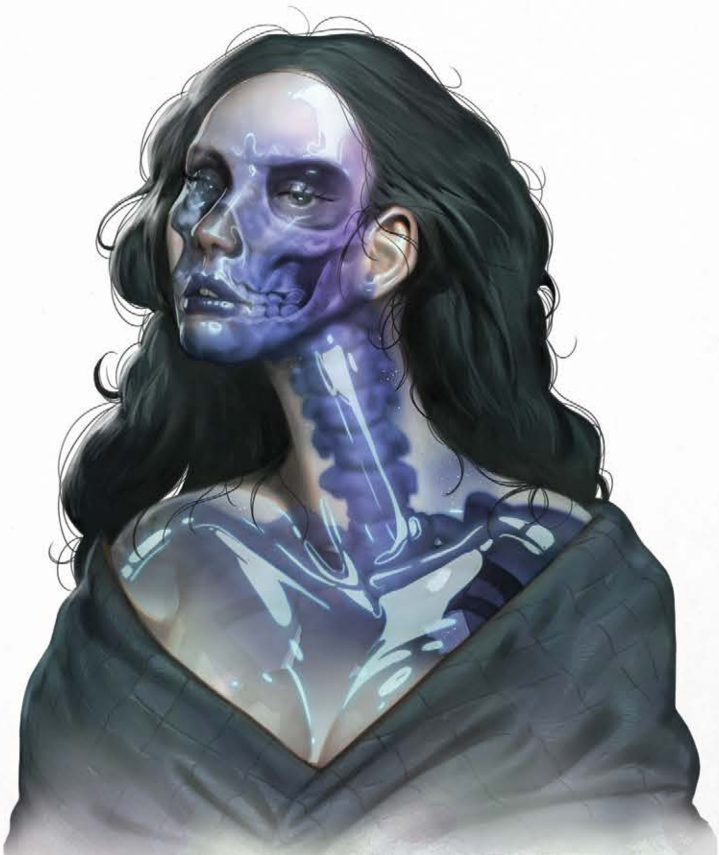
Nix's tumultuous history with the Eternal pantheon is marked by strife, much of it stemming from her own mischief. She has consistently refused to acknowledge Akh's authority and has, on occasion, collaborated with the malevolent Dos – though only when his schemes align with her amusement. With Mon, Pol, and Neph dead, Nix stands as the mightiest of the gods, wielding her power with unapologetic freedom.

Long did Dray seek her affections, and she took great pleasure in toying with his emotions through many millennia, manipulating him into crafting her many mirrors. His marriage to Fik ended her fun, and Nix has eternally borne a grudge against the quiet goddess of the cosmos, bullying her ceaselessly. Without exception, every god and goddess has felt the sting of Nix's snares, either through seduction or other cruel tricks. Although many have attempted to bring Nix to justice, the mischievous goddess' powers are too immense to be restrained, and she is irreplaceable in her role over time and the dead. Only Etso is able to serve Nix any sort of comeuppance, albeit unintentionally; many of Nix's fey creations have abandoned her in favour of serving Etso, finding him to be a far kinder and more jovial master. His softer sense of humour serves as a perfect foil to Nix's searing wit, and she is eternally vexed at how he laughs off her most cutting tricks with good grace.

Nix/Fey Dust

Nix reigns supreme over all Enchanting magic. From her cloak, an invisible, ethereal dust spreads across Akharon, imbuing power and life into Fey and Enchanters. This dust mirrors the untamed nature of its source, drifting unpredictably, appearing and vanishing without warning.

- **Truth:** Nix/Fey Dust is is Ley Dust and psionic nanites.



Ugra'thok, the Insatiable

- See Giants of Tilward write-up from pg: 160.

- **Domains of Influence:**
  - Consumption, food, giants, insects & strength.
- **Divine Servants:** Giants.
- **Iconography:** Four arms, toothed maw, insects, black flail.
- **Weapons:** Toothed maw & flail.

- **Common forms of Follower Worship:**
  - Sacrifice living people to insects on alters of bone, send food and captives to Ugra'thok or his priests, keep insects.
- **Common Follower Items:**
  - Non-metal blade and hammer weapons.
  - Non-metal outfits.
- **Common Follower Magic:**
  - Those connected to destruction, consumption, insects, strength and rot.

The Eternal pantheon is often fraught with conflict, deceit and betrayal, and few tales embody this drama more than the fall of Ugra'thok. Once a cook to Etso's divine feasts and a carer of Neph's great monsters, this god of food became tormented day and night with maddening hunger for sweeter meats, greater power and mortal praise. Ugra'thok would conspire with the Twi-Far rebel Faren Drasong, helping him steal the legendary club of Jop Jop, a weapon powerful enough to crush the head of Akh.

In Ugra'thok's mind, the scheme was flawlessly concocted with the skill of a master manipulator. He would strike down Faren in his moment of triumph, claiming the club and Akh's power for his own – but alas, Ugra'thok was no great mind, and Faren left his legs mangled and broken when they were betrayed by Neph. The gods were soon to return to the heavens and they abandoned the traitor to be forever confined to the dreck of the physical world. Ugra'thok was consumed by his gluttony and now lives only to eat.

Ugra'thok the Insatiable is a titanic horror; a grotesque, mountainous beast of fat, with a maw the size of a small castle. From the rising to the setting of the twin suns, his nation of Giants in the land of Mammon pour offerings into his great gullet as an act of worship to their creator.

Unable to move, a great city has been built up around the Akharon-bound god. The fallen deity now lives to consume, sending his minions far and wide to bring him offerings of screaming victims to digest.

Ta'Di

» See Wild Folk write-up from pg: 38.

In centuries past, on the far-flung continents of Fari and Eyna, there was a mingling of hearts and minds. Twi-Far, Kaltorans and Remnant lived in harmony, and their souls combined to unlock the mysteries of the Ta'Di'Si. At the heart of this religion were three spiritual paths that came to be known as 'Rivers', and each River was stewarded by a shepherd species that was attuned to an aspect of the spiritual world.

From the Twi-Far, the **Mystic River (Ta)**: reverence for the ethereal spirits that share Akharon. From the Kaltorans came the **Old River (Di)**: respect for the ancestors, wraiths and tested knowledge. Before they abandoned their responsibilities, the **Wild River (Si)** was the domain of the Remnant: maintaining communication with the mysterious Fey.

Over time, the Kaltorans and Remnant migrated from Fari and Eyna to new settlements on Catlan. Even though many Kaltorans have drifted to other religions, they maintain their strong connection to the Old River. Meanwhile, the Remnant were drawn away by the pagan All-Faith, severing their connection to the Wild River and scarring the world with their betrayal. Lacking true shepherds of the third River in the wake of this tragedy, the Ta'Di'Si was reduced to Ta'Di.

Mystic River (Ta) - Ethereal Spirits & Seers

All Twi-Far are indwelt by a spirit of their own, but those of the Ta'Di faith venerate the free spirits that inhabit and rule over the wilds. Of the three Rivers, the Mystic is by far the most well-shepherded, which has resulted in peaceful coexistence and contentment for most of Akharon's ethereal spirits. The respect and care shown by the Twi-Far for their duty is unrivalled, with most outside the Blood Stone Desert adhering to Ta'Di and the core tenets of their River.

Ethereal spirits are powerful and majestic beings that reflect the health of the natural world. They commonly appear as luminescent animals, but their forms and temperaments can be as varied as nature itself. Great shepherds of the Mystic River are known as **seers**, so named for their keen ability to perceive the spiritual realm and commune with the beings that live there.

The most important role of a seer is to commune with the spirits and maintain a healthy connection between people and nature. While some spirits are prone to rage and destruction, it is the work of the seers to divine if this is due to the desecration of their domain, or because they are corrupted and must be purged.

Those of this River are most often found in remote communities, having chosen the domain of a powerful Great Spirit and settled there for worship and protection. Of all the Ta'Di, seers have the greatest connection to the world around them, able to petition their spirit patrons for boons and warnings of coming catastrophes. Skilled seers can hear the relief of the earth as it is watered by rain, feel the cry of a tree severed by lightning, and share in the joy of a mother wolf at the birth of her pups.

Old River (Di) - Wraiths & Soothsayers

Those who follow the Old River of the Ta'Di - whether Kaltoran, or from another species - afford the greatest of respect to all ancestors and past events. A core tenet of this River is that of primordial wisdom: the belief that life's trials can be navigated by gazing into the past and seeking wisdom from ancestral experience. Their techniques for doing so are diverse, including Kaltoran meditation, communing with wraiths or studying ancient tomes.

The shepherds of this River are known as **soothsayers**. Renowned for their wise council and careful approach to decisions, they are most commonly found in libraries and schools across Akharon's towns and small cities. Children under the care of a soothsayer are taught from a young age to respect the vast repository of knowledge offered by those that came before, whether they are Kaltorans gleaning this knowledge from their ancestral memories or simply following the Old River tenets.

Wild River (Si) - Fey & Witches

The fey are by far the most dangerous and unpredictable of Akharon's spirits, becoming even more so after the Remnant shepherds abandoned their sacred duties. In the modern era, few choose to adhere to the path of the Wild River, and fewer still remain to pass on its knowledge. Those who choose to walk this trail are known as **witches**, often found only on the fringes of small settlements where they are both feared and respected.

Fey typically appear as purple or black insects - especially butterflies - or vermin, such as toads or mice. The most dangerous fey are the goblins: diminutive creatures with immense power and wild personalities.

Those few adherents to the Wild River often possess arcane Ta'Di knowledge that remains mysterious even to the other two Rivers. They devote themselves to learning the nature of the most powerful fey in their domain so that they may perform enchanting rituals that gift them power of mind and time. However, without a true shepherd species to tend to the River, the fey will forever remain capricious and inclined towards chaos.

Eternal Reformists

Upon their migration to the Catlan continent, the Kaltorans found themselves exposed to new ideas and religions. While still respecting the ways of the Old River, many saw value in the Eternal priesthood of the Catla Empire. Pressured by the dominant cultures all around them, these ancient Kaltorans came to acknowledge the priesthood's deities as the true gods, with the spirits viewed as lesser created beings.

This reformation has led to some conflict in the otherwise peaceful Ta'Di community, with many Twi-Far fearing a second River break. More dogmatic groups have gone so far as to claim that the Kaltorans have already betrayed their oaths, leaving the Mystic River as the last remaining bastion of pure Ta'Di'Si.

Aharon, the Life Giver

- **Domains of Influence:** Life, animals, plants & healing.
- **Iconography:** Green leaves, stag horns, leafy animals.
- **Weapons:** Antlers & magic (life).

- **Common forms of Follower Worship:**
  - Construct effigies of living plants over wood and bones shaped in antlers, purification rites of bathing and chanting, seasonal festivals with food and dance, heal wounded animals, tend to young plants, clean waterways.
- **Common Follower Items:**
  - Wood and special weapons.
  - Light outfits.
  - Healing utilities.
  - Animal mounts.
- **Common Follower Magic:**
  - Those connected to animals, healing and plants.

"He walks in emerald majesty, bestowing gifts upon those who bind their hearts to the land."

– Marius Skyglow,
Seer of Aharon.

A spirit taking the form of a glittering green stag with massive horns, Aharon gallops through the forests of the world, summoning a storm of leaves around himself as he travels. It is said that this Great Spirit never grows weary, running eternally and only ever glimpsed in passing. Destroyed plant life and burned forests spring to life in the wake of his charge, a miracle granted only by the one known as the Life Giver.

In an age before history and the memory of mortals, the wild fey threatened to annihilate Akharon through their unchecked actions. Although the danger passed, great portions of the world were left broken and ruined. Many great forests burned and oceans were polluted with foul slag. For the first and only time in memory, Ogonjo the World Snail intervened, breathing a stream of life from the cracks in her shell that coated the world, purifying all from earth to sky. Some of her will lingered in the emerald storm that swept across Akharon, and as it coalesced, Aharon was born: a living embodiment of all that brings life and renewal.

Despite his healing domains of authority, Aharon is understood by the Ta'Di to be an impersonal force. He cares for all living things – mortals, spirits, fey and beyond – but the influence of the Life Giver is so transcendently broad that he expresses this care without obvious compassion or favouritism. Aharon is not given to emotion or desire; his nature is life, striving for its preservation as a primordial drive rather than a conscious purpose.

His presence in legends is appropriately austere, with Aharon depicted as a pure force of nature – likened to a spring rainstorm or a bolt of lightning – rather than a character with wiles and fickle emotions. He heals for that is what he is.

Stag Seers

Those Ta'Di seers dedicated to Aharon have made an undying pledge to the land, foregoing cities and settlements in favour of simpler living. Unlike many lesser spirits, Aharon has no home, although he favours forests, woods and jungles for their dense concentration of plants and creatures. Thus, his followers become semi-nomadic, drifting to places where the land has been damaged or disrespected. They rest in polluted or overly harvested locations until their task of rejuvenation is complete.

The abilities of Aharon's followers are many, and despite his inscrutable, impersonal nature, the Life Giver bestows power freely to those who care for life and the world's little spirits. Aharon's seers are renowned for their life magic as they are able to call upon spirits of the soil to transfer that primal energy to the sick and to grow plants. Their powers can also be used for aggressive protection of life, increasing their strength and growing barbed vines to trap, ensnare and shield others.

They are typically strongest when connected with the earth; attempting to perform healing or plant magic within a city or factory can produce strange and unintended results. For this reason, Ta'Di followers of Aharon are known to carry jars of fertile soil, living plants and even fresh vegetables on their person, ensuring that they always have a source of purity.

Enraged Spirits

Foremost among their Ta'Di duties is the calming of enraged spirits. Although mostly peaceful, spirits dwelling within forests and jungles can be provoked by the desecration of their habitat. These often coalesce into the form of huge animals, wreathed in swirling energy that is a reflection of their anger. Without Aharon's seers, extermination is often the only option.

However, Ta'Di rituals allow for the gathering of magical residue in the wake of Aharon's eternal charge, which must be stored within living beings; saplings, small creatures, or even the seer's own body, for a short time. This power is then focused into calming rituals, bidding the offended spirits to return to the forest and await the true renewal of their home. A seer of Aharon must regularly travel to collect this energy, or find a fissure of power from Ogonjo's great shell.

Eternal Perspective

Eternal priests and reformed Ta'Di teach that Aharon is a child of Jop Jop and a mortal. Jop Jop transformed herself into a beautiful doe to enjoy the peace of a great snow-covered forest where she was trapped by a hunter's snare. She allowed herself to remain ensnared so that she could bring justice to the greedy hunter.

When the huntsman discovered the doe, he already had enough food for his motherless children and he freed her after binding her foot with cloth torn from his own clothes. Jop Jop revealed her true nature and lived with the hunter for a time.

Bipin, Elven Craftsman

- **Domains of Influence:** Crafting, tools, trade & elves.
- **Iconography:** Hexigons, gridded patterns.
- **Weapons:** Spiritbound weapons, traps & magic (metal).

- **Common forms of Follower Worship:**
  - Construct wood or stone totems of Bipin, handcraft intricate figurines of tools, cleansing rituals of cleaning your workspace and tools, link spirits to items using spiritbinding, fulfil the wish of a spirtbound spirit.
- **Common Follower Items:**
  - Magic and spiritbound weapons.
  - Magic outfits.
  - Caltrop, magic and potion utilities.
- **Common Follower Magic:**
  - Those connected to creation, fire and traps.

> "Bipin's idly crafted trinkets are engines of destruction. How much more should we fear the crafter's crowning achievements? Such creations may destabilise nations."
>
> – Caleb Anvil,
> Kaltoran blacksmith.

Bipin, Elven Craftsman of the highest order, has no time for idle hands. Long before the dark age, aeons before the races awakened, Bipin was crafting. When the Ogonjo dies of old age and Akharon plunges into the abyss, Bipin will continue crafting.

The workshop of the Elven Craftsman lies deep within the **Sunblight Caverns**, beyond many fiery perils, guards and traps. He cares little for whether his 'customer' is mortal, ghost, fey or any other great entity, granting an audience to anyone who reaches his forge alive. The craftsman cares only for the perfection of his creations, and has only a single allegiance: the Fey Monarchs, for whom his projects are completed for free and on time. The rest of the fey view Bipin as a mad inventor, but are still willing to trade valuable commodities for his services: rare materials, riddles for his entertainment, or even living followers. Many great entities possess personalised weapons and treasures commissioned from the Elven Craftsman, and these are among the most powerful items to be found in the entire world.

Spiritbinding

Although Bipin is capable of creating anything at his whim, he has a singular speciality: spiritbinding. This technique involves linking a spirit to an object, infusing it with power dependent on the strength and temperament of both. Many of the guardians of the Sunblight Caverns are spirits bound to objects who have given themselves to Bipin... some by choice, and others offered as bartering material by a greater entity. Many such items have been scattered throughout Akharon – perhaps for Bipin's own amusement and research.

Instead of money or materials, Bipin will often present mortals with an offer of trade: take a spiritbound item into the world and uncover its true power by fulfilling the wish of the spirit within. These desires range from ridding their home realm of a great evil, to returning them to the care of an elusive Great Spirit. Spiritbound items possess their own will, requiring the forging of a partnership rather than simple practice. However, their full awakening has led to the creation of some of history's most powerful and legendary artefacts.

Witchy Craft

Followers of Bipin are often those enamoured by his skill, seeking to better their own crafting and infusing talents. These witches are often found plying their trade in remote crafting shops, selling some of their magical merchandise to travellers from distant towns. Many of Bipin's more adept followers are also capable of spiritbinding, though the practice is governed by strict rules: only willing spirits may be used in the process, and they must receive the blessing of a Ta'Di seer (ethereal or elemental) or soothsayer (wraith). Only those who are willing to ensure that the spirit's wish is fulfilled may purchase these items, as the spirit will often be trapped forever within a weapon, jewel or trinket.

Some dark witches ignore these rules – such as those Twi-Far from evil clans in the Blood Stone Desert – and forcefully bind unwilling spirits to cruelly shaped metal items.

Eternal Perspective

For traditional Ta'Di, Bipin is the supreme master of crafting. However, reformed Ta'Di also worship the Eternal gods; this includes Dray the deity of passion and crafting. The two are thought to share a rivalry aeons in the making, constantly attempting to outdo each other. At the stoking of their egos or perceived slight to their work, Bipin and Dray engage in impromptu smithing contests, their furious competition causing the fires of industry to erupt from the tops of mountains. Without exception, the results of these matches are spectacular creations: weapons of war worth thousands of soldiers, mystic talismans that defy the fundamental laws of magic, or machines that think and fly.

Legends tell of the Elven Craftsman exploring the void in one such impossible machine, having grown bored of the limitations of Akharon and desiring new materials, new ideas and new techniques. Stories paint florid pictures of a ship able to dance and sail across the tides of the eternal void, propelled by the flames of Bipin's forge. To this day, Ta'Di children still excitedly point out streaking lights across the night sky, wondering at the spoils of Bipin's latest voyage into the unknown.

While the Ta'Di offer no explanation for the origin of Bipin, the Eternal priests teach that he and other elves were crafted by Dray during the time of Creation to impress the goddess Nix. Despite Bipin's intense rivalry with his creator and his isolation from others, he does care for the god and the wellbeing of the elves. Legends say that if the elves are ever threatened with extinction, Bipin will cast open his vaults to arm his kin with great tools of war.

Collopsi, Storm Nymph

- **Domains of Influence:** Water ways, storms & music.
- **Iconography:** Blue mask, crashing waves.
- **Weapons:** Magic (water).

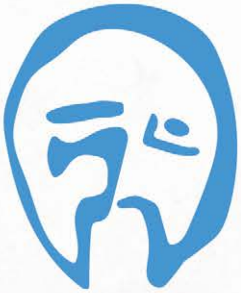
- **Common forms of Follower Worship:**
    - Create floating effigies of aquatic creatures and spirits, rituals of song over the sea or wind, aid lost spirits and ships.
- **Common Follower Items:**
    - Spear and range weapons.
    - Cloth outfits.
    - Focus utilities.
- **Common Follower Magic:**
    - Those connected to movement, song and water.

On days when the skies are veiled, and the depths of the ocean churn with mystery, there can be heard a sweet song drifting across the waves. This is the eternal song of Collopsi the Storm Nymph: shepherd of the water Elementals and supreme lady of the deepest oceans.

Collopsi resides at the bottom of the Gale Sea, ruling over an underwater kingdom of aquatic spirits. Fluid and ever-changing, she may appear in many forms, but is commonly witnessed as a towering woman of sea coral and weed. Her appearances on the surface coincide with violent weather patterns including thick fog, lightning and powerful gales. Despite all this, Collopsi is not inherently violent; merely fickle and fond of change. She revels in the struggles of mortals against storms and monsters, and yet delights in their triumph should they overcome her challenges. An audience with the Storm Nymph is a terrifying affair for anyone, but Collopsi is nonetheless generous to all who she deems worthy.

When the Twi-Far made their fateful journey across the sea to heed Peridil's call, it was Collopsi, at the Phoenix Lord's behest, that protected them on the voyage. Her water Elemental servants guarded their ships against dangers, and Collopsi was heard to sing day and night, acting as a beacon to Fari and Eyna. As a gesture of eternal gratitude, Twi-Far to this day make offerings to the sea, joining with the Storm Nymph in song during seabound festivals.

The Eternal priesthood and reformed Ta'Di believe Collopsi to be a child of Corp and Akh.



Doijn, Frozen Dragon Wraith

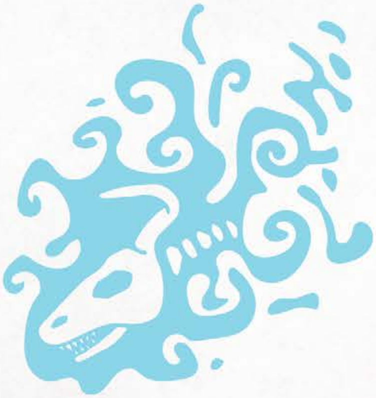
- **Domains of Influence:** Cold, dreams, visions & wraiths.
- **Iconography:** Dragon bones, curling winds.
- **Weapons:** Magic (death, ice & storm).

- **Common forms of Follower Worship:**
    - Leave bone effigies out in snow storms, perform burrial rites for the dead, care for distressed wraiths and those with nightmares.
- **Common Follower Items:**
    - Companion and special weapons.
    - White and grey outfits.
    - Grimoire and great utilities.
- **Common Follower Magic:**
    - Those connected to cold, dreams and wraiths.

During the dawn of the Age of Illumination ancient Jötnar giants and their Troll allies killed a great slumbering frost dragon – Doijn – in a vast cave beneath the White Expanse. Evil soothsayers from among their clans ripped the soul of the dragon from his body and coalesced it into a great and terrible wraith. They hoped to bind the spirit to their will but were unable to tame such a mighty soul. Doijn now exists as a ghost, roaming the arctic south in an endless flying sleep, his enchanted dreams manifesting an eternal blizzard that follows him as he glides over mountains, snow drifts and oceans.

Unlike other Ta'Di great spirits, Doijn is barely aware of his noble status. Despite there being no true malice in his actions, Doijn's mere presence is enough to warp the weather across vast distances, swiftly turning a bountiful spring harvest into a frozen wasteland. Those caught within the heart of the storm – the spirit's true essence – are forced to share in Frozen Dragon Wraith's melancholy dream; should their minds break, they are forcibly transformed into a violent ice wraith, many of which now inhabit the icy wastes of the southern tundras.

The Jötnar alone have knowledge of the spirit's true nature, referring to Doijn as 'the Void Within the Storm'. They use this knowledge to penetrate the outer maelstrom, resist the enchanting backlash, and move within the core of the Dragon Wraith's storm as he endlessly roams. While this provides the perfect cover for random raids, Jötnar soothsayers have also been able to catch whispers from Doijn's fleeting mind; draconic secrets thought lost to time.



Fodneer & Kaliao, Fairy Monarchs

- **Domains of Influence:** Fey, enchantment, madness, time & dark forests.
- **Iconography:** Pink insect wings, pink lines & circles.
- **Weapons:** Magic (enchantment, mind, time).

- **Common forms of Follower Worship:**
  - Leave out offerings of sweets to the fey at night, perform dancing rituals, weave rings of flowers to be placed over great trees, guard secret Argentia Trees.
- **Common Follower Items:**
  - Special weapons.
  - Cloth outfits.
  - Grimoire utilities.
- **Common Follower Magic:**
  - Those connected to chaos, dreams, illusion, mind (Fodneer), mischief and time (Kalio).

> "Amidst the faerie court, where shadows play,
> Fey royals lurk, craving souls astray.
> With ethereal beauty, their power unfolds,
> Stealing life's essence, as tales are told.
> Beware their enchantments and the price they extol,
> For once entwined, your mind they'll control."
> – Sigrid Softscale,
> Dracim witch.

The realm of the fey: a transient dimension of fantastic magic and natural laws utterly foreign to those of the mortal world. Its inner workings are a phantasmagorical mystery, but a scant few truths are known. First and foremost, the identity of the two Fey who act as the realm's gatekeepers, and rule over the Fey of Akharon: Sir Fodneer and Lady Kaliao, the Fairy Monarchs.

Their true forms are as giant, iridescent butterflies, although they take great pleasure in changing their appearance as a mortal might change their hair. Legends abound of Fodneer and Kaliao taking the shape of people, joining hunting parties or crossing paths with roaming adventure seekers. They revel in the chaos that ensues after they throw off their glamour and reveal their true nature, although what happens next – a fight, a reward, or bewitchment into thralldom – is entirely up to their whim.

Chaos is simply the nature of the two, as they are entirely dedicated to the belief that they may do as they wish at all times. While other faiths regard them as cautionary tales for young ones, the monarchs are actually known to be especially fond of children who share their vivid imaginations and love for mischief. In a strange twist of fate, the royal Fairies also serve as a cautionary tale for parents being abusive towards their children, lest they end up bewitched to dance for days or age a decade overnight.

Power & the Halls of Joy

Fodneer and Kaliao are known by many names, including the honorary title of 'the First Fey', harkening back to an age of legends. When the Fey first emerged from their realm, so the story goes, they found the mortal world and all of its parallel rules impossible to comprehend. Lost to destructive madness, they rampaged across Akharon until Fodneer and Kaliao used their magic to consume the minds of mortals and spirits to gain an understanding of this strange new realm. They took it upon themselves to travel the world and establish Akharon as a new home for the Fey. For their service and power they were given the title of 'Monarch' as they only have authority over the Fey.

The Fairy Monarchs' mastery of Enchantment magic is legendary; while Fodneer specialises in the mind, Kaliao has a penchant for manipulation of time. Deep within the forests of the world you can find an **Argentia Tree**, sleeping at its roots may transport you to the **Halls of Joy** on the edge of the Fey realm: a towering palace formed from intertwining trees, the branches infused with ancient magic and home to countless mad courtly slaves. Time flows erratically within its labyrinthine corridors, and few explorers are able to resist the whispers of the Fairy Monarchs emanating from the walls, imparting secrets so wild they twist the minds of mortals. It is the fondest wish of many a techno-magical enchanter to retrieve but a single leaf from the Halls of Joy, so as to extract the unique magical energies. Thus far, most have fallen prey to the Monarchs' fey guardians or been driven insane.

While the couple most often act in accord, their personalities differ in ways both large and small. Fodneer is the more aggressive, quick to anger and swifter to advocate for suffering. These traits are tempered by Kaliao, known for her mischievous nature and relentless merriment. While Fodneer is more likely to dominate mortals with his magic and will, Kaliao has a far greater fondness for trickery and disguise. It is difficult, however, to discern truth from fiction amongst the many legends of the Fey. For the majority of mortal encounters they will show a united front that befits their rank, but in private they can fight each other with passion.

Royal Witches

For those Witches who choose the Fairy Monarchs as their patron, power is gained by making a pilgrimage to a hidden Argentia Tree and meditating on the whispers from the Halls of Joy. These Witches are renowned for their mastery of enchantment magic, but this power comes at a price. The Fey lords continue to whisper in the minds of those who gaze upon their realm, allowing them to use their arcane knowledge for a time, but eventually calling them to the Halls to become a part of their mad court.

Eternal Perspective

The Eternal priesthood have a simple perspective of the Fey Monarchs, as they see them as alternative personas for the goddess Nix. The reformed Ta'Di practitioners are divided on the topic, some accept them as Nix, while others believe them to be her wild and untamed children.

Incarneia, Goblin Witch

- **Domains of Influence:** Fear & nightmares.
- **Iconography:** Broken pink line.
- **Weapons:** Slaves & magic (enchantment, mind).

- **Common forms of Follower Worship:**
  - Torment and twist the minds of spirits, lie to powerful people, enslave people and spirits, create and fund cults to Incarneia.
- **Common Follower Items:**
  - Companion and special weapons.
  - Disguise outfits.
  - Grimoire utilities.
- **Common Follower Magic:**
  - Those connected to enslavement, fear, illusions and lies.

"Where ground turns to iron and cold winds bite, Incarneia rests,
When children howl and warriors weep, Incarneia hunts.
At fated union of memory and nightmare, Incarneia feasts!
With heart bound fast to home and blood… Incarneia falls."

– Elisheba Feyright,
ancient banisher of Incarneia.

No matter species, religion or creed, there is always an incarnate evil; the terrible adversary of legends and tales that strikes fear into children and adults alike. For the Ta'Di, there is Incarneia.

An ancient figure of malice and deceit, Incarneia is a goblin of frightening power that is especially adept in twisting the minds of mortals. She is especially feared by the Ta'Di for her appearance: cloaked in the benevolent guise of an elegant ethereal spirit, she traps her victims in horrific illusions until they bend to her will, or their minds simply shatter. Known for coveting beautiful items and trinkets, the Goblin Witch's favoured haunts are ruins with unclaimed treasure, where her apparitions lie in wait to ensnare travellers to act as thralls in her domain.

Only the most twisted and evil witches dedicate themselves to Incarneia as their fey patron, though she remains relentless in her whispered promises of power and dominion. Despite the fear surrounding her presence, a highly requested Ta'Di festival performance is '**The Last Feast of Incarneia**'. Considered by some to be a true event from ages past, it tells the rousing tale of adventurers who overcame the Goblin Witch's machinations and dealt her a decisive defeat, banishing her for generations.

Ogonjo, the World Snail

- **Domains of Influence:** Creation, wisdom & the world (Akharon).
- **Iconography:** Colourful snail, coil.
- **Weapons:** Magic (cosmic).

- **Common forms of Follower Worship:**
  - Create effigies and statues of Ogonjo, perform rituals of balance and calm, protect snails, meditate on the movements of Ogonjo and the state of the world.
- **Common Follower Items:**
  - Hammer weapons (shaped like a snail).
  - Colourful outfits.
  - Focus and potion utilities.
- **Common Follower Magic:**
  - Those connected to cosmos.

"Blessings be her world shell."

– Common Ta'Di blessing.

As the one who bears the world on her shell, Ogonjo is the most sacred and revered of all spirits. Her only concern is roaming the vastness of the eternal void, munching on her beloved cosmic lettuce; it is thought by the seers that this constant supply of nourishment is what brings about new life to Akharon.

Where others may perceive the World Snail as an uncaring entity that has no knowledge of the life that she brings about, the Ta'Di hold Ogonjo in the highest esteem for her unpretentious majesty that leaves Akharon to the Akharons.

Dedicated worshipers of Ogonjo are constantly seeking to transcend their mundane desires and achieve a detached state of cosmic awareness. All followers of Ta'Di take comfort in her constant presence and venerate snails as sacred animals.

The mystic nutrients from Ogonjo's cosmic greens bleed upwards from cracks in her shell, great fissures in the earth, and it is from this essence that all spirits are born from. In this way, she is considered 'mother' to all spirits and the greatest among them. Legends tell of **Ogonjo's Wellspring**, a fantastical sanctuary of myth and wonder in which Ogonjo's essence flows from a great waterfall. Whosoever stands beneath this flow may commune with the World Snail and learn the secrets of the eternal void. As a result, many yearn to find Ogonjo's Wellspring, with some even considering it a path to return the Ta'Di to the Ta'Di'Si.

Owzer, Fey Beetle Guardian

- **Domains of Influence:**
  - Defence, peace between civilisation & nature.
- **Iconography:** Pink beetle, footprints.
- **Weapons:** Bow, halberd, magic (enchantment) & sword.

- **Common forms of Follower Worship:**
  - Encourage harmony between civilisation and nature, protect young people and animals, move unseen.
- **Common Follower Items:**
  - Blade and range weapons.
  - Stealthy light or ornate heavy outfits.
  - Tome utilities.
- **Common Follower Magic:**
  - Those connected to protection, time and vision.

"Yes I believe in the natural order – and it's convenient that I just so happen to be a force of nature."

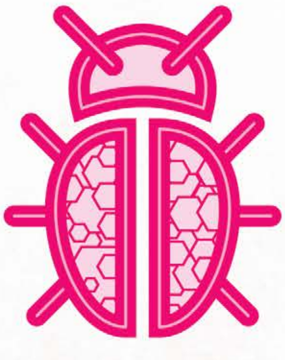
– Amos Field
zealous Knight of Owzer.

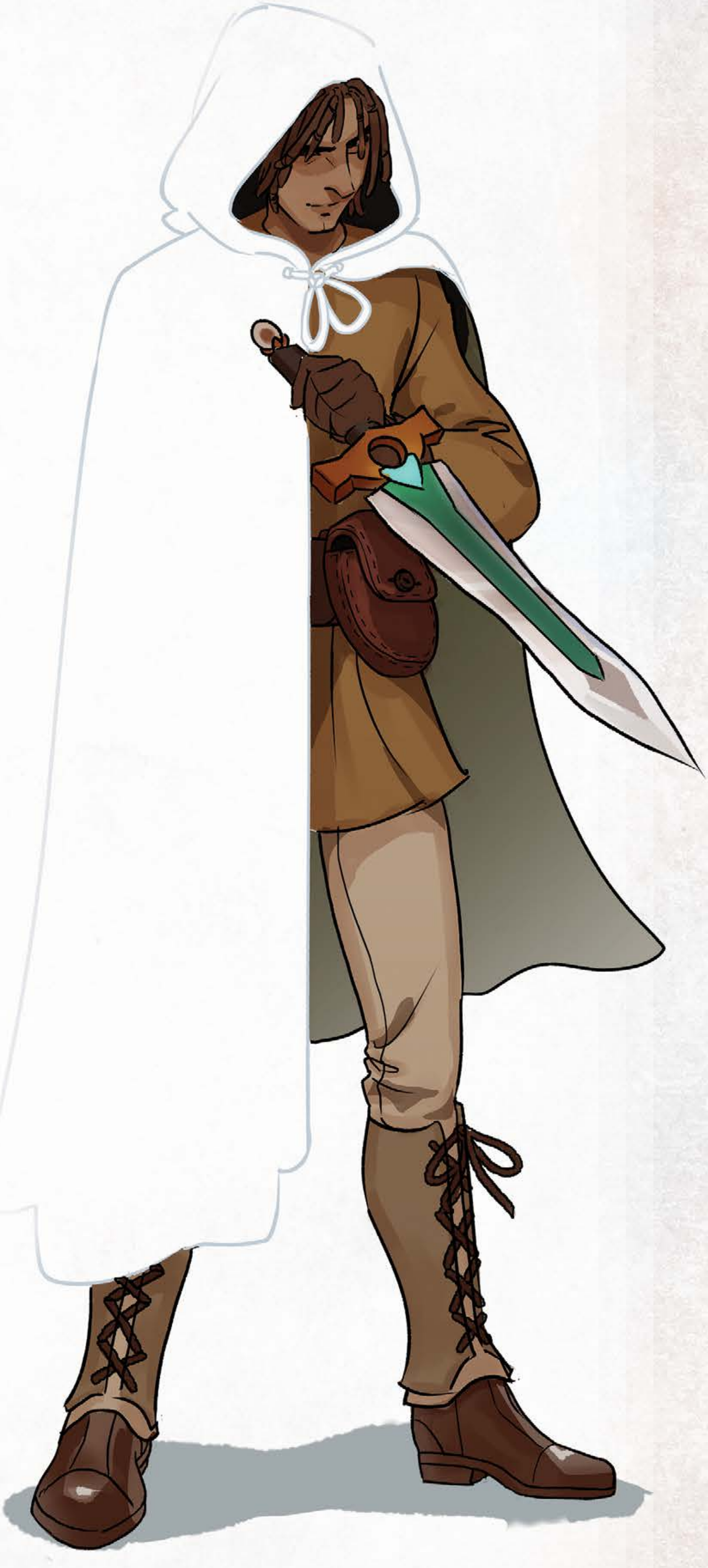
Owzer is a massive, invisible, beetle-like guardian spirit that roams the borderlands between civilisation and the wilds. A keeper of balance, he ensures neither nature nor industry overtakes the other, mending wounded forests and tempering unchecked predators. Though unseen, his presence is felt in rustling leaves, footprints in the soil and the sudden hush of animals sensing his passage.

He is a young and a new kind of great fey spirit that is not bound to the ancient patterns, wild places or Fairy Monarchs. Some say he was created out of necessity during the Drudic War, an effort by Akhorn herself to protect civilisation, recognizing it as vital and worthy as any forest, mountain, or ocean.

Taking up the Task

The **Beetle Rangers and Knights** are an order of warriors who have sworn to uphold Owzer's sacred task. Cloaked in muted greens and earthy browns, they patrol the shifting borders between civilisation and the wildlands, defending those in need and curbing what grows unchecked. Some wield steel, others enchanting magic, but all heed the silent call of the unseen guardian. They aid lost travellers, drive back reckless expansion, and quell beasts that threaten harmony. To most, they are mythic wanderers – neither wholly of the wild nor the world of men, but ever watchful in the spaces between.





Kaltoran beetle ranger.

Peridil, Phoenix Lord

- See Twi-Far write-up from pg: 32.

- **Domains of Influence**:
  - Ethereal spirits, fire, death, rebirth & Twi-Far.
- **Iconography**: Burning bird, pillar of fire, coiling embers.
- **Weapons**: Magic (death, fire).

- **Common forms of Follower Worship**:
  - Construct great statues of Peridil, create and burn effigies, protect and care for Twi-Far and ethereal spirits, perform rites of rebirth, fund the Ember Sanctum temple.
- **Common Follower Items**:
  - Range and special weapons.
  - Light outfits.
  - Focus and great utilities.
- **Common Follower Magic**:
  - Those connected to death, fire and life.

"The Phoenix Lord rises, wreathed in flame, deathless and eternal – may all Twi-Far and ethereals bow to majesty."

– Common Fari and Eyna saying.

On Akharon's first day, when Ogonjo breathed life into the world on her shell and ignited the fires of history, Peridil was born from the flames. Taking the form of a magnificent firebird, the Phoenix Lord is the ruler of all untamed ethereal spirits, a beloved entity to many Twi-Far, and second only to Ogonjo herself in the Ta'Di hierarchy. With dominion over the realms of fire and rebirth, Peridil dwells among the Twi-Far of Fari and Eyna, although her influence spreads across the face of the world were young Twi-Far are in need of spirits to bond with.

In the Age of Darkness, the Twi-Far had no place to call their own, roaming through the dangerous wilderness and steadily dwindling as they fell prey to the encroaching night. Peridil called to them from across the vast oceans, promising peace and sanctuary if they would only heed the summons. Few in those days dared to venture out into the sea's murky depths, but the desperate Twi-Far made the journey, arriving at the islands of Fari and Eyna. The Phoenix Lord greeted them with kindness, using its power to shield the islands from the dangers beyond, and being the very first to teach them the ways of spirits. Even today, the Twi-Far remain grateful for Peridil's gifts, esteeming him above all others and holding a month-long yearly festival – the **Ecstasy of Embers** – in the Phoenix Lord's honour.

The Merging

Peridil's vast powers allow it to connect with the minds of ethereal spirits across Akharon, which it uses for its chief purpose: sending untamed spirits to merge with young Twi-Far. Whether the spirits are born on Fari and Eyna, or elsewhere in the world, Peridil is innately aware of every single Twi-Far and sends them a spirit. Despite the Phoenix Lord's power, it does not force or coerce its subjects: some Twi-Far reject the sent spirit and seek to align with a spirit of their choosing.

Volcanic Roost

When the Twi-Far first arrived at Fari and Eyna, Peridil spoke to them from a large volcano. Over time, the great temple of **Ember Sanctum** was carved inside the smouldering caldera that now serves as the Phoenix Lord's chief residence. Considered one of their most sacred sites – second only to the body of their creator god Pol at Stronghold (pg: 65) – many Twi-Far from across Fari and Eyna travel there every five years for worship and pilgrimage. Peridil may be visited by any who seek its guidance, appearing to most as a surging column of flame within the temple's deepest stratum, too bright to gaze upon with the naked eye. When Fari or Eyna are threatened, Peridil emerges from the volcano in its true firebird form, a sight so rare that generations of Twi-Far have lived and died without witnessing it.

Fire Seers

The magical gifts of the Phoenix Lord to its seers are many, and can be given even across continents. Seers of Peridil are easily identified by their mastery of fire, drawing upon the power of flame spirits for anything from simple bolts of flame to great destructive conflagrations. However, Peridil also has an often-misunderstood connection to death spirits: to the Phoenix Lord, death is not a thing to be grieved, but a harmonious link in the chain of rebirth, a philosophy shared by its Seers. With fire magic in one hand and death in the other, Seers pledged to Peridil are both feared and renowned, following the path of peace by extinguishing that which would cause strife.

Despite Peridil's peaceful nature and lordship of all ethereal spirits, it has become a hated enemy of Twi-Far from the Blood Stone Desert. These slavers reject the traditional ways of both Ta'Di and their Twi-Far kin from Fari and Eyna. They despise the process of peaceful merging and believe Peridil's spirits to be a method of subjugation. To their people, the Phoenix Lord is a distant tyrant who wishes to enslave them, and its hold must be broken for them to maintain their freedom. The vast ocean makes assassinating Peridil almost impossible, although its downfall is prophesied upon the reincarnation of their great hero Faren, who will part the waters and overcome the treachery of the Storm Nymph: before he crushes the head of the phoenix. His final swing will shatter the heretic enclaves of Fari and Eyna and deliver all Twi-Far into true liberty.

Eternal Perspective

The Eternal priesthood and reformed Ta'Di believe Peridil is a sliver of Pol's divine soul that has been kept alive by Akh and Ath in a great spirit servant of Jop Jop. Even this tiny fragment of Pol is too powerful for the spirit, and it must die and be reborn again and again.

- **Truth**: Peridil is a powerful Faren who survived (possibly through rebirth) the death of his Twi-Far host.

Zowilza, Elemental King

- See Elementals write-up on pg: 40.
- See Grave & Morass Mountain Elementals write-up on pg: 137.

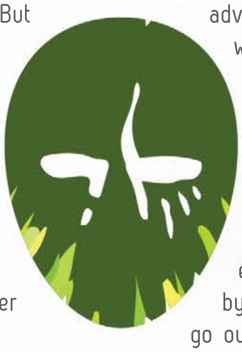
- **Domains of Influence:** Elementals, wisdom & self-control.
- **Iconography:** Green or gem mask, gem crown.
- **Weapons:** Fists

- **Common forms of Follower Worship:**
  - Wear a mask, Pilgrimage to the Scar of Ascendence, obey the directions of Nymphs and Dryads, slay ravenous Elementals, prevent the deaths of Elementals by fire.
- **Common Follower Items:**
  - Hammer weapons.
  - Outfits with a mask.
  - Resplendent utilities.
- **Common Follower Magic:**
  - Those connected to earth.

"Is the Elemental King safe?"

"Safe? No, not in the slightest – nor is he predictable. But he is good, and he is wise. And if I must choose a ruler, I'd take those two traits over any other."

– Unknown seer and apprentice.



Tales are told far and wide of the Morass Mountains: cliff faces that move, monsters with flesh of stone, and even thinking plants with masked faces. The truth goes far beyond the whispered rumours: the Morass Mountains serve as the court of the Elementals, and presiding over them in wisdom and strength is Zowilza, Elemental King.

As an Elemental grows in size, their intelligence and hunger grow with them. Recognising a need for leadership among his kind to save them from extinction, the ancient **Dryad Zowil** sequestered himself deep within the Morass caves and feasted for centuries on all manor of subterranean Neph Spawn and cave fungi. From below the surface of Akharon he whispered wisdom to his many servants to pass on to the surface.

Just a few years ago when he burst forth from the earth to claim his rightful rule, the quake rippled across the continent and even through the ocean floor, spirit-sensitive seers felt his arrival as far away as the islands of Fari and Eyna. The newly created gorge is now known as the **Scar of Ascendence**, the seat of Zowilza's power and eternal reminder of his strength.

Towering over the mortals of Akharon, the Elemental King is a being of jagged stone and crystal. Befitting his royal title, a rough-hewn circlet of precious jewels and ores line his body, taken from the treasures that lie deep within the Morass Mountain caves. When the suns and moon shine down on the mountain peaks, the majestic lights upon the Elemental King's brow are undeniable proof of his monarchy.

Eternal Hunger

The Elemental King is defined by a raging hunger that crashes upon the rock wall of his immense mind. Zowilza's better nature has united Elementals across the continent, directing their hunger to more benevolent pursuits, and even establishing wise Dryad and Nymph councils to maintain order in far-flung regions. However, at Zowilza's size, he is utterly ravenous to the point where it threatens his very sanity.

The Elemental King's vast intellect is a crucial lynchpin in keeping his kind from anarchy, and he will not relinquish his intelligence by reducing his size to lessen his hunger. Should he ever submit to his urges, then a wave of destruction may sweep outwards from the Morass Mountains in a great cataclysm that could destroy both the Kingdom of Ire and the Warped Kingdom.

Zowilza's worst spates of hunger are assuaged by war with the Warped Kingdom. As quickly as the dragon king's mysterious corruption spreads across the land, so do the Elementals to consume it as they do any other material, and strangely with no adverse effects on their bodies. In times of greatest need when the Elemental King takes to the battlefield himself, the mountains tremble at his footfalls; only the dragon demigod Languorem can overcome his vast strength and push him back to the Scar of Ascendence.

Guidance

Small settlements of tiny Elemental have been established in Morass' many caves and tunnels, shepherded by Nymphs and Dryads who temper their hunger before they go out into the world. However, many Elementals still give in to their instincts, wandering free and uncaring if their next meal is plant, stone or flesh. In spite of the dangers, an audience with Zowilza is the fondest desire of many, as the Elemental King's long life and accumulated wisdom mean that he is able to answer almost any question put to him. This wisdom does not come cheap, requiring rich offerings of either sustenance or (in the rarest cases) an exchange of equal knowledge.

Ta'Di Seers who gain Zowilza's favour – either by making a pilgrimage to the Scar of Ascendence, or for their cooperation with Elementals – are given a royal mask. This symbol is recognised throughout Akharon by many spirits. These Seers are often friendly with larger Elementals and have an almost symbiotic relationship with lesser ones: drawing upon their power for spells, summoning them for guidance through treacherous areas, or even caring for them as permanent companions.

Eternal Perspective

To the Eternal priests and reformed Ta'Di the Elementals were born of the blood of the outcast god Ugra'thok and are cursed with his eternal hunger and hatred for Neph. but they are not loyal to any god, and are battling against their instincts to find their place in the world.

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